

THE MAN FROM TORONTO

A Comedy in Three Acts

BY

DOUGLAS MURRAY



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A Comedy in Three Acts

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DOUGLAS MURRAY

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TO HER
MISTRESS OF HER ART
WHOSE DISTINGUISHED CREATION
OF
POLLY PERKINS
ENTITLES HER TO MORE HONOUR
THAN I CAN SHOW HER

D. M.

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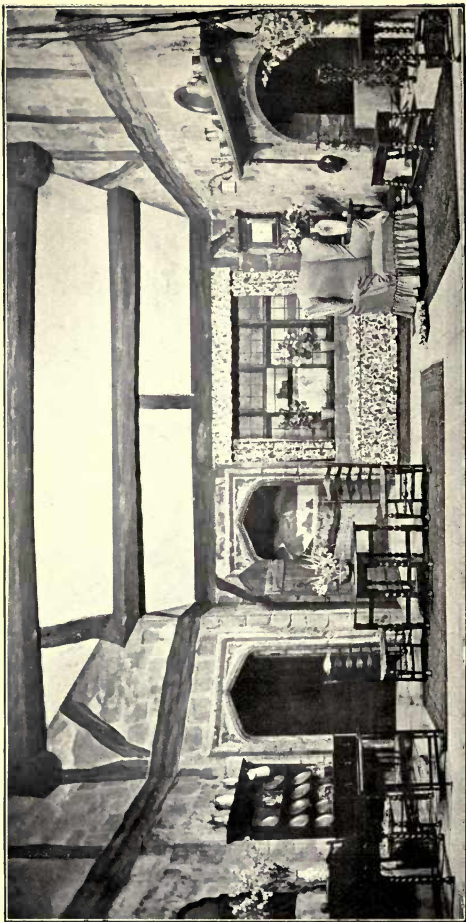
Produced on May 30, 1918, at the Royalty Theatre, London, with the following cast of characters :—

FERGUS WIMBUSH (a Canadian of five-and-thirty, just over on his first visit to England, and for reasons which the Comedy will show) . . .	<i>Mr. George Tully.</i>
RUTH WIMBUSH (his elder sister) . .	<i>Miss Marion Ashworth.</i>
ADA WIMBUSH (his younger sister) . .	<i>Miss Gwen Gwynne.</i>
MRS. CALTHORPE (a young widow spending most of her time at Beach House, Teignmouth) . . .	<i>Miss Iris Hoey.</i>
MR. PRIESTLEY (Guardian, Trustee, Uncle by marriage, and Legal Adviser to Mrs. Calthorpe).	<i>Mr. Eric Lewis.</i>
ROBERT GILMOUR (her young cousin, on a visit to Beach House) . . .	<i>Mr. Henry Daniell.</i>
MARTHA (the smart little cook-general of Beach House)	<i>Miss Margaret Moffat.</i>
MRS. HUBBARD (the ugliest woman in Christendom, whose features play an important part in the Comedy) . .	<i>Miss Ada Palmer.</i>
MINNIE HUBBARD (her daughter) . .	<i>Miss Phæbe Hodgson.</i>

SCENE.—*The entire work of the play is enacted in the parlour of Beach House, Teignmouth.*

TIME.—*Whenever you please.*

On July 1, 1918, the play was transferred to the Duke of York's Theatre, London, where it continued for 486 performances.



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THE MAN FROM TORONTO

ACT I

SCENE.—*The parlour of MRS. CALTHORPE'S seashore cottage in Devonshire, which forms the setting for the three acts of the play. The room is that of a woman of taste, consequently is not extravagant in absurd decoration. It is the living and livable room of a small house on the coast, with the sea-beach just beyond the casement windows. The dresser on the right wall has a little serviceable plate, decanters of spirits, syphons of aerated water, cigar boxes and tins of cigarettes. A writing table is below it. A round table in centre of room. A large easy grandfather's chair beyond large open fireplace in left wall. An oak bench in front of fireplace, a bell-pull below it. A door in the back wall opens to the beach. On the left of it is the wide casements with window seat. On the right of it, across the angle of the room, the door to the hall.*

TIME.—*The time is about the middle of May, there is just a nip still left in the air, and although windows and doors are flung wide open, fires in the grate have not yet been discarded.*

(Upon the rise of the curtain on an empty stage, ROBERT is heard from the beach mournfully humming "All that I ask is Love." He is seen to come to the casement carrying a mast and sails from a dinghy across his shoulders, and a couple of boat cushions.)

ROBERT (calling in). What-o—there! *(A pause.)*
A-hoy!

(There being no answer he leans the mast against the

*wall outside and enters—looks round rather glum
Goes to door, opens and listens.)*

(Calling into the hall) Is everybody dead?

MARTHA *(off)*. No, Mr. Bob. I'm all right.

*(With a grin ROBERT comes back and flings the cushions
down as MARTHA appears in the doorway.)*

The Mistress has gone to the village. I don't think she expected you ashore until late.

(He grunts and MARTHA comes in a pace.)

You look as if you'd got the hump.

ROBERT. I'm fed up, Martha.

MARTHA. N-o! What on?

ROBERT. Oh, life generally. What's your opinion of life, Martha?

MARTHA. Well, life's life, ain't it, and when you're dead, you're done with.

ROBERT. Ahahaha!

MARTHA *(quite motherly)*. You've had no lunch. There's a nice little bit of cold 'am and chicken.

ROBERT. No—I'll have a whiskey and soda.

MARTHA *(rather startled—to sideboard)*. Very well, though I don't hold with whiskey in the afternoon—not at your age.

ROBERT *(with an expressive sigh)*. I've had three weeks of Teignmouth, Martha, another two days of it and I'll be dead.

MARTHA *(chuckling)*. It's too slow for yer, is it? *(Soda from syphon into glass.)* Why don't you work? Don't you want to work? *(Turns with glass and gives it.)*

ROBERT. I want to make money, of course, if that's what you mean. But how, Martha—how?

MARTHA. Well, I make twenty pounds a year, and I reckon me tips and presents come to another ten.

(ROBERT grins at her and drinks.)

Then me board and washing must be equal to another thirty—that's sixty.

ROBERT (*between drinks*). I don't make sixty shillings.

MARTHA. Don't yer?

ROBERT (*emptying the glass*). Not sixty pence, and my education cost at least a couple of thousand pounds.

MARTHA. My! A pretty bad investment, wasn't it?

ROBERT. You think so! Well—perhaps you're right. (*Tickled and meditates.*) I suppose if a chap like me were to ask a girl like you to marry him, you'd give him a bit of your mind?

MARTHA. Well—I should want to know 'ow things were likely to go on, of course.

ROBERT. A—h! Then I don't think I'll risk it.

(*He holds out the empty glass, and as she takes it he imprisons her hand, and tries to put the other round her waist.*)

MARTHA (*smilingly replying him*). Now then, behave yourself.

(*He laughs and clutches her, she half-heartedly pushes him away.*)

Get away, you'll break the glass in a minute.

ROBERT. Come here! Keep still!

(*She laughs and tries to wriggle away, but he holds her firmly.*)

K-e-e-p still!

(*She laughs louder and fights half-heartedly for freedom, but he overpowers her and clasping her close kisses her rapturously. As he withdraws his embrace he discovers MRS. CALTHORPE standing in the doorway watching him with rather amused astonishment. As their glances meet she cleverly runs back, and ROBERT frees the girl. As she straightens out her apron the front door bell rings.*)

MARTHA (*craftily*). The Missis! What a bit o' luck she 'adn't got her key, she'd 'ave caught us.

(*Exit MARTHA quickly, closing the door.*)

ROBERT (*incensed with himself*). 'T'ough!

(*He looks about undecided, then he makes a bolt for the casement, but reaching it changes his mind and bravely remains as MRS. CALTHORPE enters. As she comes to her table she discovers him.*)

MRS. CALTHORPE. Hullo! You got back before I did.

ROBERT. Obviously!

MRS. CALTHORPE (*cynically*). A bit of luck for you, wasn't it?

ROBERT (*apologetically*). Kissing a skivvie is like eating an apple before breakfast—it keeps one fit.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*curbing her disgust cleverly*). Well, the next time you want to eat an apple before breakfast, just you rob some *other* woman's orchard. (*She rings the bell.*)

ROBERT (*alarmedly*). You're not going to rag her, Leila.

(*No answer.*)

(*Fervently.*) Lil, don't, there's a good soul. I'm fearfully sorry, I am really.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Run away—run away——

ROBERT (*clutching her arm*). But, Lil darling . . .

(*Enter MARTHA. ROBERT, quite crumpled up, retires slowly and goes up to his mast outside. MRS. CALTHORPE removes her hat which MARTHA takes, then her coat.*)

MRS. CALTHORPE. I caught a glimpse of Mrs. Hubbard in the village, has she called?

MARTHA. No, ma'am.

(*MRS. CALTHORPE turns and MARTHA is dismissed.*)

(*Exit MARTHA.*)

(*ROBERT, who has fiddled with the mast outside, returns smartly.*)

ROBERT (*quite relieved*). You're a brick, Leila. We've laid up the dinghy and I've brought in all the gear. Old Duke thinks she'd better be scraped and painted right away.

MRS. CALTHORPE. I'll see Duke myself. When do you think of returning home?

ROBERT. Oh—er—Saturday—You hinted Saturday, didn't you?

MRS. CALTHORPE (*bluntly*). Could you conveniently make it to-night or to-morrow?

ROBERT (*scared*). Why, old lady?

MRS. CALTHORPE. Well, one of you will have to go—either you or Martha—

ROBERT. Lil!

MRS. CALTHORPE. —and as I don't intend to lose Martha, it must be you.

ROBERT. But—why?

MRS. CALTHORPE. Now, now, Bobby, don't let's make a fuss about nothing. You're not an infant, and I'm not a booby, but I can't possibly say nothing and do nothing. You've just got to pack, my boy. Pack!

ROBERT (*digging his hands into his pockets*). O—h! What rotten luck. Augh! (*Then he turns and saunters up. From casement he looks sheepishly back at her.*) It isn't the first time I've kissed a skivvie.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Now you're making it worse. If I were you, I should let the matter drop, and recognize that Cousin Leila is a brick, and leave it at that.

(*He slowly accepts the situation, recovers the mast and sail and is just turning away when he apparently sees something.*)

ROBERT (*calling in amusedly under his breath*). Here's old Mother Hubbard and her fat-headed daughter, perhaps that'll put you in a better humour.

(*Exit ROBERT, turning left.*)

MRS. HUBBARD (*off*). Well, Master Bob, is Mrs. Calthorpe in?

ROBERT (*off*). Yes, Mrs. Hubbard—she was just complaining she hadn't seen you for ages.

MRS. HUBBARD (*off—fatuously*). Oh, how nice of her.

(*MRS. HUBBARD and MINNIE enter casement, beaming.*)

Dear Mrs. Calthorpe, (*hand out*) Minnie is just off—

we thought we *must* come and wish you good-bye.

MINNIE (*sniggering*). Y-e-s!

MRS. CALTHORPE. I should think so indeed. (*To the GIRL.*) Well—how are we feeling, plucky?

MINNIE. Yes, Mrs. Calthorpe, thank you. I'm quite resigned to go.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Bravo! When do you cross? This evening?

MRS. HUBBARD. Not until the morning. I'm taking her as far as Paris, and seeing her safely on her journey.

MRS. CALTHORPE. That's wise—the Paris railways are most bewildering.

MRS. HUBBARD. That's what Papa said.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*bored*). Er—er—do sit down—I suppose you're catching the 3.20.

MRS. HUBBARD. No, no, we don't dare to sit, you're always so pressing, and we must just look in on Mrs. Smithson.

MRS. CALTHORPE. How dull Teignmouth will be without Minnie! (*To the GIRL.*) What shall we all do?

MINNIE. E-e-e-e-e! Not much fear of you being dull, Mrs. Calthorpe. E-e-e-e!

MRS. HUBBARD. Minnie was rather hoping you'd give her a little sound advice before she left.

(MINNIE *slyly pulls her mother's dress.*)

MRS. CALTHORPE. Yes—I can give her some excellent advice: never wear damp shoes, and always eat an apple before breakfast.

MRS. HUBBARD. There! You'll remember those two things, won't you?

MINNIE. Yes, always, mother. (*She has dived into her bag.*) I've brought you my photograph, Mrs. Calthorpe, I thought you'd like to have one.

(MRS. CALTHORPE *takes it.*)

And this is mother. (*She proudly holds up another.*)

MRS. CALTHORPE (*taking it*). Oh! how excellent. What a speaking likeness of you. (*Contemplates the beaming MRS. HUBBARD.*)

MRS. HUBBARD. Yes—it is good, isn't it? Everybody says so.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Splendid!—the poise of the head is so natural.

MRS. HUBBARD (*squirring with dignified joy*). Er-er! I haven't had my photograph taken since Minnie was short-coated. And so many of my friends have urged me so many times, that I felt I ought especially as Minnie was going abroad.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*at the photograph, holding it away to get a better impression, but inwardly boiling with impatience*). Excellent!

MRS. HUBBARD. Mr. Pentelow took it—twelve and six a dozen—twenty-four shillings for two dozen. I had eighteen. Poor man, he has a hard struggle with eleven little ones and an ailing wife. I really think I must have the other six.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Oh, I should. And may I really keep them both?

MINNIE. Yes, Mrs. Calthorpe—do!

MRS. HUBBARD. And now we must be going.

MRS. CALTHORPE. You're sure I may not hurry on tea for you?

MRS. HUBBARD. Quite sure, thank you, dear Mrs. Calthorpe, (*moving*) I shall come and tell you all about our travels.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Yes—I shall be most anxious. And Minnie must write to me very often.

(MINNIE *squirms under* MRS. CALTHORPE'S *kindly arm round her shoulders.*)

MRS. HUBBARD (*edging to casement*). We'll go this way. We've got Jinks' fly meeting us at Mrs. Smithson's with the luggage. Good-bye. (*Shaking hands with* MRS. CALTHORPE.)

MINNIE. Good-bye, Mrs. Calthorpe.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*bravely kissing her*). Good-bye, dear, and heaps of good luck.

(*At the casement there are more "Good-byes" and a great deal of sniggering from MINNIE, who is reluctant to tear herself away.*)

MINNIE. I'll be sure and write, and send you some picture postcards from Rome. Good-bye. E-e-e!

'The two WOMEN pass off—MRS. CALTHORPE standing to wave in response, and ROBERT appears from nowhere and adds his waving, and shouts a few cynical good-byes as make-weight, until MRS. CALTHORPE, unable to stand any more, comes in on the top of a most expressive sigh and stands C. gazing fixedly at the photographs in her hand.)

ROBERT (*turning in*). What funny things you see when you haven't got a gun.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Bob, I hereby forgive and pardon you for kissing Martha.

(ROBERT *shouts for joy and cuddles her affectionately, and both look again at the portrait and laugh.*)

And poor Mr. Hubbard is one of the most really fascinating men I've ever met. (*Amusedly incredulous.*) How do these things happen?

ROBERT (*manfully*). I think we get mesmerized by you.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*photograph on mantelpiece*). What, by such a thing as this?

ROBERT (*with amusing point*). Didn't you mesmerize that Canadian buck, dear old Mr. Winkley?

MRS. CALTHORPE. Am I a Mrs. Hubbard? I don't want to brag about it, but I can *do* things, and *say* things, and *look* things.

ROBERT. You certainly can. D'you know, Leila, I've often wondered why you didn't pal up to old Winkley. Rolling in wealth and—

MRS. CALTHORPE. Don't be ridiculous.

ROBERT. Well—it wasn't a bad spec', you'd have been an old man's darling for a year or two and then blossomed out into something that matters, instead of a—— (*Stops.*)

MRS. CALTHORPE (*rather staggered*). Well! Go on—say it.

ROBERT. May I?

MRS. CALTHORPE. Certainly.

ROBERT. Instead of a—a dear little might-have-been.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*with a grim little sober smile*). Bobby, I never thought you had the slightest insight into anything. You're right—a dear little might-have-been. No romance and precious little meaning. We're a very big family, old chap.

ROBERT (*relenting, softly in her ear*). I didn't mean it.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Oh! I've known it for a long time. What an existence! We get up in the morning to do the same things we did the previous morning, and for hundreds of previous mornings before that. We eat a little, play a little, fool a little, and then comes bed with a little more sleep. (*As she turns and roams up.*) All as mechanical as the sea. Every day it's low tide and high tide and it's always groaning and swishing. O—h! I'm sick of the eternal nothingness. I want to create commotion. I—want—to—live.

ROBERT. Well, why don't you?

MRS. CALTHORPE. Because our stupid conventions still keep woman anchored. You don't think I live in Teignmouth seven months out of the year because I like it. I do it because I *must*. And—d'you know what? (*She stops and flings her words at him.*) There are millions of us doing the same thing—all watching and waiting and praying for something to happen—it doesn't matter what. O—h! for a Knight in Shining Armour to ride up and carry us away out of the doldrums.

ROBERT. Phosphorine isn't a bad thing for the nerves, you know.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*with fine scorn*). It isn't nerves, you gosling, it's inspiring Imagination trying to—to—to— (*her ten fingers itch to get at a meaning*) trying to— What do I mean?

ROBERT (*with a grin*). I dunno.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*sitting with a reckless little laugh at her table*). Nor do I. I shall pack up as well as you, and we'll go to London together. Will your mother have me for a week or so until I can plan things out?

ROBERT (*deprecatingly*). Will she!

(*A loud persistent ringing of the front door bell. Both prick up their ears at its persistency.*)

ROBERT. Somebody in a hurry.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*alert*). That isn't a Teignmouth ring.

ROBERT (*with a chuckle*). Perhaps it's the Knight in Shining Armour.

(*MRS. CALTHORPE rises significantly.*)

I'd better clear. I'll go and catch a couple of soles or a halibut for dinner—(*turning from casement*) which do you prefer, soles or halibut?

(*But she is stupidly watching the door. Enter MARTHA.*)

MARTHA (*announcing*). Mr. Priestley.

ROBERT (*shouting back sotto voce*). Ough! Then I'll make it a cod.

(*Enter PRIESTLEY smartly, handing his hat and umbrella to MARTHA, who retires, as ROBERT disappears through casement.*)

MRS. CALTHORPE (*with delighted surprise*). Nunkie.

PRIESTLEY (*clutching both her hands*). You're surprised.

MRS. CALTHORPE. What's happened? An earthquake?

PRIESTLEY. Well, it's an eruption, and I think volcanic. (*Breaking off into an absurd irrelevance, turning up to casement.*) By Jove, the smell of the sea is delicious.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*clutching his coat and pulling him back*). Just you stick to the eruption—you can smell the sea later. (*She twists him round like a wilful child.*) I know—you've come to lecture me again on finance.

PRIESTLEY (*getting to the hearthrug*). Er—er—yes, perhaps I have.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Then go back, I'm not in the humour. I've got a fit of the blues, and I warn you—I'm dangerous.

PRIESTLEY. Well, you're always that, aren't you? And the more dangerous you become, the more complex my position becomes.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*flaring up*). What on earth do you mean by "complex"?

PRIESTLEY. Well, perhaps it will save time if I tell you. First of all, I started by being your late husband's Uncle.

(She groans.)

No, I didn't—first of all I was your guardian, wasn't I? *Then* I was your uncle by marriage. Then I was your Trustee, and then I became your legal adviser.

(He has ticked them off on his fingers.)

MRS. CALTHORPE. You haven't come unexpectedly all the way to Teignmouth to—to—play finger tips. O—h! (*Dashes to door and calls.*) Martha.

MARTHA (*off*). Yes, ma'am.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Tea! *Strong* tea! (*Closes the door.*)

PRIESTLEY. Now, Leila, your—little stock of tricks is very amusing, but for once in a while I want your attention.

MRS. CALTHORPE. And I warn you, I'm what Bobby calls "fed up."

PRIESTLEY. So am I. As your Trustee I'm very much "fed up." You are a hundred and twenty-seven pounds fourteen and ninepence overdrawn at your bankers, or you were on Tuesday, and I'm perfectly sure it has increased since then, and as there are no more dividends for another five months I'm wondering—as your Trustee what's going to happen. As your uncle by marriage I know what's going to happen, but as your Solicitor I'm going to see that it doesn't happen.

(The minx glares at him blankly, then tries another dodge. She appears to soften, and she sidles up to him.)

MRS. CALTHORPE (*sweetly*). As my uncle—by marriage—you've forgotten something.

PRIESTLEY. Oh! what's that?

MRS. CALTHORPE (*sticking her face an inch nearer his*). You haven't kissed me.

PRIESTLEY (*pushing her off with both hands*). Oh no, you don't. This is business, serious business. For the moment uncles don't count.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*foiled*). Then you're going to be horrid.

PRIESTLEY. No, I'm not going to be horrid.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Yes, you are.

PRIESTLEY. I—am—not.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Yes you are. (*Tears.*) You're going to lecture me on Financial Morality. I hate finance and I hate morals—I mean *financial* morals. What's the good of having a solicitor if you can't overdraw a paltry hundred pounds or so. I know nothing about money matters. That's *your* business. Can't you see I'm crying.

(*No effect on PRIESTLEY. She tries temper.*)

I don't care what's going to happen, or what isn't going to happen. I'm—sick—of—everything. (*She bangs things about on sideboard.*) I'm sick of uncles—an—an—and trustees, and—money, and—sick of myself, there! (*Roughly spreading tea cloth on table.*)

PRIESTLEY (*naïvely, after a pause*). Have you finished?

MRS. CALTHORPE. I have not finished, and I hope you're not stopping long because I've got some packing to do. I'm going to London in the morning with Bobbie for the season.

PRIESTLEY. Really?

MRS. CALTHORPE. Yes, really.

PRIESTLEY. Well, I don't think you are.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*furious*). Now look here! Look here. Uncle!

(*Enter MARTHA with tea and the discussion breaks. She assists diplomatically at the table.*)

(*Exit MARTHA.*)

(*She sits top side of table and irritably pours out. PRIESTLEY takes a cup of tea from tray and returns to hearthrug,*

catching sight of MRS. HUBBARD'S photograph on mantelpiece.)

PRIESTLEY (*a laugh*). Oh! (*Puts cup down on bench and takes photograph.*) What a funny old dear. Who is it?

MRS. CALTHORPE (*mulish*). My friend Mrs. Hubbard!

PRIESTLEY. Old Mother Hubbard! Is there by any chance a Mr. Hubbard—still alive?

MRS. CALTHORPE. There is a Mr. Hubbard.

PRIESTLEY. Brave man. (*Replaces photograph and recovers cup. Sits armchair.*) My dear Leila, something very exciting has occurred.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*jumping up*). No.

PRIESTLEY. Something quite romantic.

(*Drinks his tea quite leisurely, sending her into fits of impatience.*)

MRS. CALTHORPE. Do you want me to scream?

PRIESTLEY. No, I want you to be perfectly calm, if you can be calm, and to tell me all there is to tell about this Mr. Winkley—the old gentleman you met on the liner returning from New York last summer.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*aroused*). Mr. Winkley—you know all there is to know about Mr. Winkley.

PRIESTLEY (*in his best judicial manner*). He—er—he was greatly attracted. Unusually attracted I believe.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Not more than most men who meet me—on liners.

PRIESTLEY. That, of course, I quite understand, but—er—his attraction, if I remember, focussed itself into an actual proposal of marriage.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*catching the judicial inflection, as if she were replying to a cross-examination*). It did.

PRIESTLEY. And you declined it.

MRS. CALTHORPE. I refused *him*. He was a dear sweet clean old gentleman, I admit, but . . . (*She breaks off and looks up searchingly.*) Mr. Winkley hasn't been getting at you, has he?

PRIESTLEY. The dear sweet clean old gentleman is

beyond the possibility of getting at anybody. He's deceased.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*blarneyingly*). Dead! O—h! poor old chap. (*And she turns, affectedly holding her handkerchief to her nose.*) Isn't it funny, whenever I feel I ought to shed a silent little tear—it won't come.

PRIESTLEY (*ironic*). Frightfully amusing.

MRS. CALTHORPE. (*A thought strikes her, and her eyes dart at him over the handkerchief.*) Nunkie—he hasn't left me anything?

PRIESTLEY. No! Oh no—not directly.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*with delicious craft. A wild hope*). Indirectly?

PRIESTLEY (*cautiously*). Well—er——

MRS. CALTHORPE (*pushing across to him*). Have another cup of tea, dear?

PRIESTLEY. No, thanks.

MRS. CALTHORPE. A cigar?

PRIESTLEY. No!

MRS. CALTHORPE. Er—er—would you like a wash . . . after your journey?

PRIESTLEY. No! no! no! (*Irritably.*)

MRS. CALTHORPE (*soothing him and squatting on bench*). It's all right—it's all right, but *do* get on with it. Did he leave *very* much—indirectly?

PRIESTLEY. He died enormously wealthy. And his will discloses a very high regard for you.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Ah! (*simperingly*). Mind you, Nunkie, I always thought him a delightful man. And I'm rather sorry, of course, that—but you know how things *won't* happen sometimes, don't you?

PRIESTLEY. I know how you won't *let* things happen. Your wilfulness, your—your downright disregard of your own interests, your—er—indiscretions, your—your—(*bursting*) you know you can't go on playing fast and loose with Providence. Providence won't have it—he'll kick.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*with a clever little pout, sidling up to him*). You know you love me.

PRIESTLEY. Love you—I'm downright afraid of you

—I mean afraid of what you'll do. That's why I didn't dare write about this business. I positively didn't *dare*.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*scared*). Didn't—dare! (*Wildly thinking.*) What is it?

PRIESTLEY. Sit down.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*sitting in a flash*). Start from the very beginning—I promise not to interrupt.

PRIESTLEY (*pompously*). It turns out Mr. Winkley was one of the wealthiest men in Toronto. He was never married, never even expressed a desire to marry until he had the misfortune to meet you.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Misfortune!

PRIESTLEY. Well, there are people who think your repeated refusals hastened his collapse. *Why* you didn't marry him and become the mistress of three-quarters of a million, Heaven only knows.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*in the highest register*). Three-quarters of a million! Dollars!

PRIESTLEY. Pounds! (*She howls foolingly.*) I should imagine that nice clean healthy old gentlemen of sixty-one or two . . . (*He is preening his own feathers at the idea of it*) with three-quarters of a million do not grow on apple trees.

MRS. CALTHORPE. They do not, and he's really dead?—positively?

PRIESTLEY. He is emphatically dead.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Who—who—who gets it?

PRIESTLEY. His money? He's left it in trust to his only nephew—(*papers from his pocket and pince-nez on nose*)—a Mr. Fergus Wimbush, the son of his only sister, who also has two *daughters* living, but for some reason or other they're not even mentioned in the will.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*weakly*). And I'm not even mentioned?

PRIESTLEY. I'm coming to that—in due course, I repeat the whole estate is left to his said nephew, Fergus Wimbush—*on—condition* that the said Fergus Wimbush succeeds where he—the testator—failed, and marries you.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*a scream*). What!

PRIESTLEY (*ignoring the interruption as he turns over his papers*). Marries—you. And upon such marriage—if it takes place, one half his entire estate becomes your sole and absolute property, (*closing his papers*) the neatest and the most delicate bit of revenge I ever heard of.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*bewildered*). I don't understand.

PRIESTLEY (*pompously rising and meandering*). It seems extremely simple to me. Here we have an elderly gentleman who falls violently in love at a very dangerous age. The lady laughs at his—

MRS. CALTHORPE (*interrupting*). No, Nunkie, not laughs.

PRIESTLEY. —the lady laughs at his advances—we will not bandy words. Death comes—as it comes to all of us. He must leave his wealth to somebody or something, and he conceives a—a—vindictive scheme—if you like to put it so . . .—a vindictive scheme whereby he can show how much he admired the lady and how much he can punish her at the same time.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*viciously*). And so I'm bargained for and sold like a—like a dead duck.

PRIESTLEY (*holding up his hands to stay her*). If the said marriage does *not* take place within a specified time—twelve months, I fancy—the said nephew receives a beggarly ten thousand pounds, and the rest of it goes to the establishment of some ridiculous charitable trust in Toronto.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Good Lord! (*Rising.*) And do you think I'm going to . . .

PRIESTLEY. No! (*It is a positive shout and stops her.*) I—do *not*—think you're capable of doing anything sane. That's why I came down in person instead of being drawn into interminable correspondence. But perfectly understand this, my dear Leila, if you can't bend your stupid dignity to the dictates of the gods, I shall—much as I love you—as an uncle by marriage—I shall wash my hands of you and renounce my trusteeship. (*With the emphasis of finality, taking out his watch.*) I've finished. What's the next train back to London?

MRS. CALTHORPE. You dare! You—you—Augh!

Do you think I'm going to marry any man just because an old idiot, a—a—a—cross-grained old wretch thinks he can *compel* me to marry. Oho! You don't know me.

PRIESTLEY (*wildly*). But I *do* know you, and nothin' will astound me more if this thing comes off.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Aha! Thank you for that, my dear Nunkie, thank you! (*She fumes, and there is a pause for breath.*) What's my income at the present moment?

PRIESTLEY. Roughly, five hundred and fifty pounds a year.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Well, I can live respectably on that, can't I?

PRIESTLEY. But you don't, you invariably spend seven, and the balance comes out of *my* pocket, and frankly you're not cheap at the price.

MRS. CALTHORPE. You—you disgusting old man.

PRIESTLEY. Yes, I know. I know, but I should be infinitely more disgusting if I permitted it to continue. From this moment, my dear, not an extra penny, and from now I deduct ten pounds a quarter towards the repayment of what you already owe me.

(*And he pretends to mean it, by cleverly buttoning his coat restlessly in finality. She is bamboozled by his astuteness, and is visibly uneasy. She tries another tack.*)

MRS. CALTHORPE (*after a long wait, then very menacingly*). Fergus—what?

PRIESTLEY. Wimbush.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*making a horrid grimace*). What a name—Wim-bush! What's he like?

PRIESTLEY (*elated*). A—h! (*Joyously going to her and clutching her shoulders.*) That's more like it—that's sensible—(*pat*)—he's a very charming fellow.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Then you've seen him?

PRIESTLEY. Certainly. He came to my office on Tuesday with his credentials, and an introduction from the estate lawyers.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*craftily concerned*). Really charming?

PRIESTLEY. Excessively so—to me. But—I don't want to deceive you, he's no more tickled with the condition than you are. He hadn't met his uncle for years, and unless I'm very much mistaken you'll have to do a little manœuvring if it's to come off.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*wildly again*). I won't do anything of the kind. Damn Mr. Wimbush, and all that belongs to him.

PRIESTLEY (*shocked*). O—h! I've never heard such language. (*He groans as he paces to and fro, his patience quite exhausted. As if he suddenly made up his mind, he darts to door and opens it and flings his parting shot at her.*) Good afternoon!

(*Exit PRIESTLEY.*)

MRS. CALTHORPE. Nunkie! (*Flying after him.*) Nunkie!

(*She re-appears pulling him in by the sleeve. She shuts the door firmly, releases him and nervously fiddles with her conscience.*)

I ought at least to see him, you think?

PRIESTLEY. That's precisely what I do think, I've brought him with me.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*alarmed*). Brought him! Where?

PRIESTLEY. He's waiting for me to report progress, at the Station Hotel.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*with genuine agitation*). You know this isn't kind of you, Nunkie; you ought to have prepared me—given me a chance to think it over.

PRIESTLEY. Not me. Give either of you a chance to think it over, and the whole business falls to pieces.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Then what do you want me to do?

PRIESTLEY. To allow him to call—*now*. My cab's waiting outside. I shall simply send him back in it. Meet him without any concern whatever—put on one of your most bewitching smiles, and just let things happen. (*Slyly.*) I'll tell him you invite him to stay

a day or two. (*Her eyes open very wide.*) Young Gilmour is still with you?

MRS. CALTHORPE. Yes.

PRIESTLEY. Then you can go for a nice little walk together over the sands, dine together, chat together, laugh together, and if you can't make up your minds about such a trivial thing as——

MRS. CALTHORPE. Trivial! (*Getting on the danger line again.*)

PRIESTLEY. I mean such a trivial thing as marriage.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*flaring up*). Marriage trivial! you've never tried it, my friend.

PRIESTLEY. That's exactly why I never did.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*beside herself*). Ough! (*She dashes across the room, roughly flinging a chair out of her way, curbs herself and turns.*) It isn't decent. No nice woman would allow it. I ought to have had a look at him first.

PRIESTLEY. Well, you will have a look at him first, won't you?

MRS. CALTHORPE. Now, Nunkie, you'd better go. We shall never agree about it. If you care to ask Mr. Wim . . . Wim what?

PRIESTLEY. No. . . . No, Bush—Wimbush. (*Spells it.*) W-I-M-B-U-S-H.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Well, if *you* care to ask Mr. Wimbush to call and take a cup of tea with me—I suppose he may.

PRIESTLEY (*with rare guile*). And he may bring his luggage.

MRS. CALTHORPE. You've planned it all, have you, including the luggage?

PRIESTLEY (*naïvely*). I've done my best.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*weakly*). Very well.

PRIESTLEY (*anxious to be off, watch out*). I shall make no report whatever, simply pack him into the cab, and return to London at once. Is there a likely train?

MRS. CALTHORPE. The 4.40.

PRIESTLEY (*snapping his watch*). Nicely. (*He is at door and stays his going.*) Leila!

(She doesn't answer. She is looking with anxious eyes into the fire. He smiles and crosses, lays his hand on her shoulder.)

Good luck, my dear.

(She doesn't move.)

(Exit PRIESTLEY, his gaze lingering smilingly across at her as the door closes.)

(BOBBY'S voice is heard along the beach spluttering out some absurd ditty about the briny deep. He appears at casement, his rod and fishing creel over his shoulder. He sees MRS. CALTHORPE still looking into the fireplace. He comes in, waits, then naïvely peeps to try and get a side view of her face. Concludes she's got the hump, so gives another couple of bars of the briny deep as he dabs his fishing basket on chair c., opens it and fools the action.)

ROBERT. Cod is—off. *(Diving into the depths.)* There also seems to be a shocking dearth of soles in the ocean, and as for halibut I don't believe there's a blessed one left—unless this is a halibut. . . . *(He holds up a mighty thing about the size of his hand and examines the specimen.)* Is it a halibut?

MRS. CALTHORPE *(furious)*. You've got your beastly fishing basket on my chair.

ROBERT *(unperturbed)*. Is—it—a halibut?

MRS. CALTHORPE *(all on edge)*. There's no time to fool. He'll be here in fifteen minutes. I want you to make yourself presentable; at any rate, make yourself clean—a great deal depends on first impressions, and I'm all on edge. *(To and fro restlessly.)*

ROBERT *(vacuously)*. I don't a bit know what you're talking about.

MRS. CALTHORPE *(a hand to her weary head)*. Of course you don't. I'm going to be married.

(ROBERT can't even gasp, he simply stares.)

Well—I think I am. Mr. Priestley says I ought to be married, and I suppose he knows. Not much use having

a solicitor if you don't allow him to know something.

ROBERT (*looking round for inspiration, then giving it up*). No! No!

MRS. CALTHORPE (*roughly at him as if he were the criminal*). But I think I ought to have seen him first without him knowing who I was.

ROBERT (*quite blank but still heroic*). Yes! Yes! Certainly. So do I. I—I—agree with you completely.

(*She grunts and goes off on another promenading expedition thinking wildly.*)

(*desperately*). I say, Leila! What's the wheeze?

MRS. CALTHORPE. That funny old person in Toronto has been and died and left a huge fortune to somebody or other on condition that he succeeds in making me marry him. Priestley says he's a charming man, that means he's a Scotch-Canadian with freckles and an American accent. Can—you—imagine—me—married to an American accent?

ROBERT (*emphatically*). I can't imagine an American accent married to you. No!

MRS. CALTHORPE. Well, it'll be here in thirteen minutes. Did you ever hear of such a ridiculous situation in your life. (*Off again.*)

ROBERT (*vacuously*). Well—truthfully I don't see what the situation is. I suppose Priestley knows, but if this is one of Priestley's little jobs he ought to have arranged things without all this hustle.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Of course! It isn't fair. I'm feeling a delicious ass already. What on earth can I say to the man?

ROBERT (*not understanding a bit*). The man! (*Then he grasps it.*) Oh, I see—the man. Oh! he's coming, is he? Well, I should—er—I should put on a sublime air of indifference as if the whole thing was merely boring.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*in highest register*). Yes—but he's not keen about it either.

ROBERT. O—h! he's not—then you'd better toss for it, sudden death, heads you do and tails you don't.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*furiously*). Don't be *funny*. This isn't a music hall entertainment. It's a bit of real life.

ROBERT. Then it's *very* simple. You lay down and let Destiny roll you out like a slab of dough. That's what always happens in real life.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*firmly*). But it will *not* happen to me. I decline to meet him. (*She has heroically rung the bell.*) You can offer him tea in my absence. Express my apologies, say I was called away unexpectedly and will not return for some time. If Mr. Wimbush wishes to approach *me*, he's not going to find me waiting on the mat to receive him. (*And she dashes up and down.*)

ROBERT (*philosophically*). I should think not indeed. Of course looking at it from the sober side, it isn't a bad notion to get a bit of ready money into the family, somehow. The whole lot of us at present are living on the interest of what we owe, and it can't go on. There's going to be a deuce of a bust somewhere.

(*Enter MARTHA.*)

MRS. CALTHORPE. Take the tray and serve tea again. A gentleman will be calling in a few moments—Mrs. Calthorpe has been called away by telegraph. Ask him in and Mr. Bob will see him.

MARTHA. Yes, ma'am. (*Turns away with tray.*)

MRS. CALTHORPE. You understand. Martha—I am *not*—in the house.

MARTHA. Quite so, ma'am.

(*Exit MARTHA.*)

ROBERT (*with a giggle*). I say, this is rather neat, I like it immensely. It'll warm him up.

MRS. CALTHORPE. It will give him the notion that Mrs. Calthorpe is not a cheap line from the Bargain Basement.

ROBERT (*enjoying it*). Aha! Good. We'll show him. You know he'll be frightfully cocky and I shall just—I say, suppose I give him to understand he's a rotten intruder.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*hedging*). Well—er—I think you'd

better see what sort of chap he is—*first*. Of course you know nothing about the object of his visit.

ROBERT. Oh! . . . then I can pull his leg from the start.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*still more dubious about it*). I don't think there's any necessity for you to pull his leg. I rather want you to—to—see the line of country. I'll do the leg-pulling myself—but if—

(MARTHA *re-enters*. *A wild notion seizes MRS. CALTHORPE. She looks at the girl wildly a moment, and mutters "Martha"—the notion fructifies.*)

Wait a minute—wait a minute. I've got it. Martha, I'm going to your bedroom.

(*Exit MRS. CALTHORPE majestically.*)

MARTHA (*scared*). What's up with the Mistress, Mr. Bob? I've never seen her so excited. She's going to my bedroom, she said.

ROBERT (*in sheer devilry*). She caught me kissing you just now.

(MARTHA'S face blanches in absolute horror and distress.)

MARTHA (*intensely agitated*). Then she's gone to search me box. (*In distress.*) Oh—Mr. Bob—Mr. Bob! (*She drops her face into her handkerchief and weeps.*)

ROBERT. Chuck it, you little idiot. She's done nothing of the kind.

MARTHA (*more distress*). Yes—she—has. (*She turns her back on him.*) I—wouldn't have had it happen for the world. (*Sobs.*) What—will—she—think of me now!

ROBERT. She thinks you're a jolly decent girl and that I'm an ass.

MARTHA (*shaking her head between her sobs*). No—she—doesn't.

ROBERT (*roughly*). I tell you she does.

(*A bigger gurgle from the GIRL.*)

Shut up. There's a bit of a spree on. You'll know all about it presently.

MARTHA. Oo-oo-oo !! Oo-oo-oo !!!

ROBERT (*shouting*). Shut up. (*Desperately trying to talk down the girl's blubbling.*) Don't you understand there's something in the wind, oh—shur-r-r up or you'll get blown overboard—the fact is—

MARTHA. Oo-oo-oo ! Oo-oo-oo !!

ROBERT (*desperate*). Will—you—shut—up. (*She doesn't. He screams.*) Go—away ! Go and bathe your temples ; put a cold key down your back or something.

MARTHA (*sniggering*). She didn't see you kiss me ?

ROBERT (*bluffing her*). Of course not—she can't see through brick walls, can she. Didn't you let her in ?

MARTHA. Then what did you want to frighten me for ? Give me quite a turn.

ROBERT. Aha ! (*Joyously and innocently squeezes her arm.*)

MARTHA (*pulling her arm away viciously*). Behave yourself.

(*He laughingly withdraws.*)

You'll get into trouble one of these days. (*Crosses to sweep up the grate, her eye catches Mrs. HUBBARD'S photograph on mantelpiece.*) You ought to spend a month with Mrs. 'Ubbard,—she'd take yer tail down for you. (*Comes across, stops puzzled.*) What's she gone into my bedroom for, I wonder !

ROBERT (*incorrigible*). She probably suspects things, Martha.

MARTHA (*bewildered*). What things. . . . (*Pause.*) What d'yer mean ?

ROBERT (*tantalizingly*). I don't know, Martha. I—don't—know. I'm not a family man. She's not likely to tell me what she suspects.

(*MARTHA stares him out with a scornful lip, then turns to exit as Mrs. CALTHORPE darts excitedly in, slams the door shut and stands revealed in cap and apron as a bewitching parlourmaid.*)

MARTHA (*open-eyed and open-mouthed.*) Ma'am !

ROBERT. Leila !

MRS. CALTHORPE (*darting round*). Do me up.

(ROBERT and MARTHA rush joyously to the rescue, MARTHA half a length ahead. She repels him with a look of triumphant disgust, and proceeds to fasten dress and the ends of the apron turnover to ROBERT's great interest and amusement. The operation may be fooled a little.)

MRS. CALTHORPE (*swishing round again in the highest spirits*). Well ! What do you think of me ?

MARTHA (*frightfully bucked*). You're lovely, ma'am.

ROBERT. You're simply *IT*. But what's the game ?

MRS. CALTHORPE (*to both of them*). I'm the parlour-maid. You understand, Martha, Mrs. Calthorpe is away from home. I'm—er—Perkins.

MARTHA. And what am I, ma'am ?

MRS. CALTHORPE. You're just yourself. Now run away, I'll tell you more later. But remember I'm Perkins—Perkins—Perkins, and parlourmaids always answer the front door.

(*Exit MARTHA.*)

(MRS. CALTHORPE darts to glass and surveys herself.

(*Turning joyously.*) Bobby, what about this apple (*her finger on her cheek*) before breakfast.

(*With a joyous cry BOBBY makes straight for the apple She frowns him off.*)

Keep off—keep off—I've got to write a letter. (*Then she darts to her writing table and sits and gathers writing paper, writes frantically and reads as she writes.*)

DEAR MR. WIMBUSH,—

Mr. Priestley has been here and I hoped to have received you, but an imperative call by telegram to an old friend in great distress,—

(*She flings in a saucy " Ahem ! " which ROBERT as saucily answers with another.*)

—in great distress, necessitates my instant departure, and I shall be away for two or three days. My cousin

Robert is staying here on a visit, and my parlourmaid, Perkins, a very discreet and reliable person—

(She turns half a head.) How's that?

ROBERT *(munching bread and butter)*. Quite juicy.

MRS. CALTHORPE. —A—very—discreet—and—reliable—person, will make you very comfortable if you can stay until my return. You will find Bobby quite a harmless lunatic, Yours . . . Yours—what?

ROBERT. Why not “your affectionate and loving wife,” and get it over.

MRS. CALTHORPE *(ignoring the suggestion)*. Yours—truly—no, sincerely. *(Signs it, addresses envelope, sticks it.)* Now I think you can see what I'm up to.

ROBERT *(a little nettled)*. The harmless lunatic can't see an inch of it.

MRS. CALTHORPE. Then you'd better go and finish your fishing. You're in the way.

ROBERT. I thank you. I'm like the utility man in a modern comedy—whenever the conversation drags I'm lugged in to say funny things and do 'em. Whenever anything exciting is coming on, it's always “Exit Robert—casement.”

MRS. CALTHORPE. You needn't feel ratty about it.

ROBERT. Oh, bless you, I like it. I'd rather fish than watch you fish. *(Picks up rod and basket.)*

MRS. CALTHORPE *(cleverly)*. Bobby—I'm trusting to you not to give me away.

ROBERT *(loftily)*. And if he asks any inquisitive questions?

MRS. CALTHORPE. You can just talk about—the sea—or anything.

ROBERT. Well, the sea's the sea and he can see it's the sea.

(A loud ring at the bell. Both pulled up. She rather scared. He turns swiftly and foolingly and peeps round casement.)

(sotto voce—excitedly). Here he is. *(Looks.)* I say, he's a complete knut. Come and have a look.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*darting up and getting a peep*).
Ough! Go on—off with you.

(*She pushes him out and he turns to the left. She darts again to mirror and touches her cap to her satisfaction, then she foolingly and excitedly patters across and out.*)

(*Chatter is heard in the hall—then she reappears escorting FERGUS WIMBUSH, and from this moment the personality of the adorable MRS. CALTHORPE is hidden in the personality of the bewitching PERKINS.*)

MRS. CALTHORPE (*as PERKINS*). May I take your hat, sir?

(*He hands his hat and gloves.*)

Mrs. Calthorpe has left a note for you.

(*She hands it on a small salver. He is going to take the salver.*)

No, you just take the note, sir.

(*He does with a grin and PERKINS goes out. He opens letter and reads as PERKINS re-enters.*)

FERGUS. This is most unfortunate. (*Another glance at letter.*) I understood Mrs. Calthorpe was at home.

PERKINS. She was frightfully upset about missing you, sir—she's only been gone a few minutes.

FERGUS (*hipped*). Ergh! Can't quite get the hang of things. (*Reads again.*) Well, it can't be helped, can it?

PERKINS. I'm afraid not, sir.

(*He takes notice of the GIRL and is not ill-pleased.*)

FERGUS. I guess you're Perkins.

PERKINS. Yes, sir.

FERGUS. Perkins, what?

PERKINS (*a little scared*). Perkins is my Christian name.

FERGUS. And what's your other name?

PERKINS (*simperingly*). Er—er—Polly.

FERGUS (*venturing a grin*). Polly Perkins! Well,

I've been in England four days, and the most attractive things I've seen yet are its Pollies.

He ventures a comprehensive grin, but she puts on a most dignified air, sufficient to repel an Emperor. It freezes him off.)

I suppose you know what Mrs. Calthorpe says in her note.

PERKINS. She read it over to me. I'm having your room prepared, sir. Will you take tea? Mr. Robert, I'm afraid, won't be in just yet.

FERGUS. Well, I don't know—my errand really is rather an unusual one.

PERKINS. My mistress hinted as much, sir.

FERGUS. Did she, then you may give me a cup of tea on condition that I may smoke a pipe and change my coat.

PERKINS. Certainly.

FERGUS. Reckon a man's permitted to be comfortable in these parts.

(PERKINS smiles largely and rings the bell.)

FERGUS *(lugging off his coat without hesitation)*. The fact of it is, Perkins, I've got myself up for the occasion, and I'm just frightfully uncomfortable. Tell me—why do Englishmen have creases down the legs of their trousers? *(He contemplates his creases demurely.)*

PERKINS. I'm afraid I hardly know. I've often wondered myself.

FERGUS. Does your young man wear creases?

PERKINS. I haven't got a young man—yet, sir.

FERGUS. Then you'd better come right back to Canada with me. You'd have fifty within five minutes.

(Enter MARTHA with teapot.)

Hullo! Here's another.

(MARTHA gives him the frozen eye.)

What's your name?

MARTHA *(pertly)*. Martha, sir.

FERGUS. Have you got a young man?

MARTHA (*sourly*). A young man, sir! (*She annoy-
ingly looks at PERKINS for an answer.*)

PERKINS (*laughing*). Martha doesn't believe in them
any more than I do. Do you, Martha?

MARTHA (*looks freezingly at FERGUS*). Not much.

FERGUS. Good heavens! no wonder the old country's
going to the dogs. This thing'll have to be looked into.
Now, which of you's going to get my coat?

PERKINS. Martha!

FERGUS (*giving her the coat just taken off*). In my
grip you'll find an old brown jacket—very much the
worse for wear—and a large tin of tobacco, I want that
too.

MARTHA. Yes, sir.

(*Exit MARTHA.*)

PERKINS (*at table*). Milk and sugar, Mr. Wim-
bush?

FERGUS. Neither. I've lived in a spot where both
are difficult to get, and I've learned to do without them.

PERKINS. One of the most difficult things in the
world I've heard Mrs. Calthorpe say.

FERGUS. What is?

PERKINS (*handing him the cup*). Learning to do
without things.

FERGUS (*the cup poised in the air, looking across it at
her*). By Jove, you're right, Perkins. Now that never
struck me, and yet it's jolly easy to do without when
you know the trick. (*With enthusiasm.*) That's why a
chap who hasn't got things and doesn't want 'em, can
generally double up the fellow who does. Guess you
do a bit of philosophizing in your slack time, Miss
Perkins. (*And he carefully pours his tea into his saucer
and then remembers and looks silly.*) Say, I oughtn't to
have done that, ought I?

PERKINS (*curbing her smile*). What, sir?

FERGUS. Poured tea into the saucer.

PERKINS. Why not, sir?

FERGUS. It doesn't go with the creases down the
trousers.

(PERKINS cannot refrain from laughing, and he laughs because she does.)

PERKINS. I don't know why you shouldn't. We probably began by drinking out of shells.

FERGUS. Bully for you, so we did. (*He drinks out of the saucer.*) Aren't you going to have any?

PERKINS. In England, the domestics usually take their tea in the kitchen.

FERGUS. Then to-morrow I'll take mine in the same place.

(*Enter MARTHA with coat and tobacco tin. PERKINS takes them from her and MARTHA goes out.*)

(*FERGUS has finished his tea-drinking from the cup, lays it down, and PERKINS holds the coat to his arms.*)

FERGUS. Ah! that's better! (*She gives him his tobacco and he retreats to the bench, holds the tin between his knees and proceeds to load his pipe. Chucking his head in the direction of the sea.*) What's your particular part of the ocean outside?

PERKINS (*contemplating him serenely*). The English Channel.

FERGUS. Where's all yer shipping?

PERKINS. Oh, that's out at sea.

FERGUS. At sea, is it? (*Chuckles, strikes his match.*) I guess that's where—all—our hopes and ambitions are.

PERKINS (*naïvely*). Are all *your* hopes and ambitions at sea, Mr. Wimbush?

FERGUS (*flinging his match into the fire*). Well, just at present, they're not exactly visible; maybe they're shipwrecked. That's why I've come down to Teignmouth.

PERKINS. To see—if by any chance they've been washed ashore.

FERGUS (*hugely tickled*). Bully again. (*Rising and looking amusedly at her.*) I say, what in darnation is a natty little woman like you cleaning out parlours for, and—and fidgeting over all this mighty tomfoolery.

(*He indicates the furniture.*) You haven't got the face of a parlourmaid.

PERKINS. Don't you think I have?

FERGUS. Not a bit of it. You ought to come out to Canada. Canada wants you.

PERKINS. Why, sir?

FERGUS. Because it's the land of big things. Big thoughts, big hopes, big deeds.

PERKINS (*very slowly, very meaningfully*). What are big hopes and big deeds—to-me?

FERGUS. They're in your blood. Anybody can see that with half an eye.

PERKINS (*with suppressed excitement*). Have you seen it—with half an eye?

FERGUS. Gee! I could see it with both eyes shut.

(*With a loud laugh she passes him and goes up to the casement. She looks this way and that and excitedly trills a few bars of something. He watches her.*)

Say, Perkins?

PERKINS (*coming down with her eyes ablaze and pluckily standing up to him*). Yes, sir!

FERGUS (*confidentially*). What sort of a woman is this Mrs. Calthorpe, anyway? Honest Injun.

PERKINS (*her face blanches*). She's a very charming mistress. And—er—(*she laughs*)—I—er—I think she's all right.

FERGUS. What's she like?

PERKINS (*scared*). Like! Well—she's about my height and figure—if I may say so.

FERGUS. Pretty?

PERKINS (*with delicious artlessness*). Er—er—perhaps you'd hardly call her pretty, but—she comes out all right in a photograph.

FERGUS (*eagerly*). Show me one.

(*The little minx is caught, but after a moment's suppressed horror she battles with the situation.*)

PERKINS. A photograph!

FERGUS. That's what I said—a photograph!

(A bright idea seems to get her. Very slowly her eyes turn to the photograph of MRS. HUBBARD on mantelpiece. She shudders, then desperately lifts it down and swinging round holds it to his grip and walks quickly out. Exit PERKINS as FERGUS watches the exit. He laughs and turns to photograph. A look of horror engulfs him. He sinks on chair c.)

FERGUS. Holy Gee!

QUICK CURTAIN.

ACT II

The SCENE is the same as that of the previous Act, and the time three days later. On the table are several bowls and vases of faded flowers, and a large basket of fresh flowers ready to be arranged.

(Upon the rise of the Curtain PERKINS, in a dainty new black dress, is attending to the flowers.)

(Enter ROBERT from casement.)

ROBERT. I say, you *do* look topping, Leila. What makes a woman so deliciously fresh in a cap and apron?

PERKINS. A delicate taste in "skivvies," my son.

ROBERT. Oh—dry up about it.

PERKINS. What have you done with the Scotch-Canadian?

ROBERT. He's lying flat on his back on the beach humming a most ungodly tune and looking as if he'd lost a 3 to 1 chance of Heaven. *(He digs a cigarette out of the tin.)* If something doesn't happen quick there will be a big break somewhere. I can feel it in the air. He's just informed me that Mrs. Calthorpe finds it impossible to leave the bedside of her poor old friend for *another week*. Do you imagine I'm going to keep up this silly pantomime for another week? What are you working up to? How are you going to get out of it?

PERKINS. I'm not in it yet.

ROBERT. But—but—but—what's the game? Are you trying to mesmerize him as Perkins or—what?

PERKINS *(very pointedly)*. What?

ROBERT *(an answering burst of energy)*. Well, I'm off home to-morrow.

PERKINS *(emphatically)*. You're not. You—are not going to leave this house until he does.

ROBERT. That won't be long.

PERKINS. It'll be as long as I choose to make it.

ROBERT (*quite ratty*). You don't suppose he'll keep skidding about just because there's an extremely fetching parlourmaid buzzing around? I think you've overdone it. You've been and cooked the goose that lays the——

(FERGUS comes into view and PERKINS spots him.)

PERKINS (*warningly*). A-hem!

(ROBERT spots him.)

ROBERT (*off at a tangent, roughly*). Well, just you understand, Perkins, I do *not* like my eggs hard-boiled. I've said so before and I don't intend to say so again.

(FERGUS has entered and heard the complaint.)

FERGUS (*manfully*). If I were Perkins, I should send you and your boiled eggs to—Honduras.

(PERKINS chuckles with delight and hides it.)

ROBERT. Oh, you call it Honduras, do you? In polite society we call it Halifax.

PERKINS (*very hurt, getting one in*). Mr. Robert thinks that because the Mistress is away he can be as rude as he pleases.

FERGUS. Well, he won't think it while I'm his fellow-guest.

PERKINS (*making a grimace at ROBERT behind FERGUS' back*). Ergh!

ROBERT (*leaning saucily towards FERGUS*). Look here, Fergie, you've got the hump. There's a sou'-west breeze. Let's run down to Seaton and trust to luck to get back.

FERGUS. No, I don't care about it. I've got a message for Perkins. (*Producing a letter from his jacket pocket.*)

PERKINS. For me? (*Feigning surprise.*)

FERGUS. From your mistress. (*Reads naïvely.*) "Tell Perkins to be sure and see that twill sheets are used for your bed if you do not care about linen ones."

ROBERT (*tickled*). What?

(PERKINS, with delightful inconsequence, seems to be staring in blank surprise at the letter.)

FERGUS (*handing it over*). There's nothing private.

PERKINS (*mumbling as she pretends to read the letter*). Another—week. (*Pretending surprise*.) Not—coming—back for another week. (*A sly look at FERGUS*.) Yes! *Twill* sheets if you *do not* care for linen ones.

ROBERT. Just the sort of thing a dear homely old soul like my cousin Leila would think of.

FERGUS. As if I knew the difference between linen sheets and *twill* ones. What is the difference, Perkins?

PERKINS. Well—er—*twill* of course is cotton and—er—linen is—er—er—linen.

(*A look of utter blankness exchanged between the two MEN.*)

ROBERT (*meditatively*). *Twill* is—cotton, and linen is—linen. (*To FERGUS*.) I shouldn't have thought that, would you, Fergie?

FERGUS. I wonder what I slept on last night?

PERKINS. I think you slept *on* a *twill* one and under a linen one, but I'll ask Martha. (*Towards door, but a roar of laughter from the incorrigible ROBERT arrests her, and she turns angrily to him.*) You're very funny this morning, Mr. Robert, aren't you?

(*Exit PERKINS swiftly with a sniff of derision at ROBERT.*)

ROBERT. Well, you won't come for a sail?

FERGUS. No, thanks.

ROBERT. Will you fish?

FERGUS. Not this morning.

ROBERT. Golf?

FERGUS (*roar*). N—o!

ROBERT (*looking at him, pained*). Poor devil!

(*Exit ROBERT casement, but he bobs back again.*)

What about a walk along the shore to Paignton? Sixteen miles.

FERGUS (*irritably*). I—don't—want—to walk!

(*ROBERT turns up once more, stops.*)

ROBERT (*in a piping little voice*). You'll be sorry for it. (*A wait, then alluringly.*) Coming?

FERGUS (*beside himself*). Oh—go—away!

ROBERT. Very well—I go. But I tell you, Fergie—as an old campaigner, you're—an—ass.

(*Exit ROBERT casement as PERKINS returns door.*)

PERKINS. Yes, the top sheet *was* a linen one, sir.

FERGUS. Well, it doesn't matter in the least, because I always sleep between blankets.

PERKINS (*aghast*). Then what becomes of our sheets?

FERGUS. I roll 'em into a ball and throw 'em under the bed.

(*A roar of laughter from the beach. Quite furious PERKINS dashes up to casement.*)

ROBERT (*in the middle distance*). It's all right. I was only wondering what he does with the quilt. (*Another long laugh.*)

(*She comes slowly back and stands mute a moment watching the dejected man on the bench pulling at his pipe.*)

PERKINS. You're not looking very festive, Mr. Wimbush. Perhaps Devonshire doesn't agree with you.

FERGUS. Oh, Devonshire's all right, Perkins, but I haven't quite sized up what Teignmouth means to me.

PERKINS (*fogged*). What—Teignmouth—means?

FERGUS (*smoking and nodding, then significantly as he keeps his eyes on her*). It's a tragedy!

PERKINS. No!

FERGUS. Y-e-s. If your mistress hadn't been gadding about an Atlantic liner getting poor old defenceless gentlemen to fall in love with her, I should be a millionaire multiplied four times.

PERKINS (*pretending to be astonished*). You—would be?

FERGUS (*nodding gloomily*). My Uncle Ben wanted another peep at the old country before he died. He met this! (*He takes down photograph.*) He told me she was the most wonderful woman he'd ever struck.

(Holding the photo naïvely an inch nearer to her gaze.) This was! Guess his optic nerve had got infantile paralysis or something! Twice he implored her to marry him, and she had the damned impertinence to refuse. It so cut up the poor old boy that he caught a chill, and—— *(He stops and looks up, the light of a great understanding in his eye.)* A—h! I see! That's why—the—old—serpent wants me to sleep in twill sheets. She's afraid I might catch a chill!

(PERKINS has difficulty to hide her amusement.)

Get the point! She didn't know how rich he was, but she knows now, Priestley came down on Tuesday and told her all about it. *(Throwing back the portrait and warming up to it.)* This going away is a lay off. She wants me to think what a dear kind creature she is before I see her face. *(Fiercely.)* She—funks—it! Aha-ha-ha-ha-ha! *(His laughter exhausted, he confronts PERKINS in finality.)* Look here now, Perkins—I just want you to be honest with me. If you were a strong, healthy chap, to whom money, as money, never had much attraction, would you marry a woman like that?

PERKINS *(frankly.)* If she didn't appeal to me—no.

FERGUS *(elated.)* You would not!

PERKINS. No! There isn't enough money in the world to induce me to marry anybody I didn't want to.

FERGUS *(joyously bucked.)* That settles it. I won't. *(With fervour.)* When I marry it'll be a woman. That's the only thing we ask for in Canada. It doesn't matter if she's a duchess or only a—a—or only a parlourmaid. *(“Parlourmaid” has come rather nervously.)*

PERKINS *(giving him a significant and bewitching little grin and turning).* That does you great credit, Mr. Wimbush, but I think I must be going.

FERGUS. No—don't go, Perkins.

(She stops, he gets confidential.)

There's a little point which worries me badly. I've got two sisters, one's a jolly little devil who doesn't count, but the other—well—she makes you feel some-

times that she's swallowed the kitchen poker and hadn't been able to digest it.

(PERKINS *makes a funny little grimace.*)

You know what I mean?

PERKINS. Oh! Yes! All majesty and—er——

FERGUS. You're on the line. I promised they should cut in—a quarter of a million each. (*Very blue.*) They won't stand for it.

PERKINS (*pretending to be blue too*). They certainly won't.

FERGUS. They'll move heaven and earth to get me to marry the corrugated iron lady with the grin like the cat has when she's eaten the canary.

PERKINS. Y-e-s!

FERGUS. Ada won't say much—but Ruth! She's got a tongue like an adder's tooth. When she says a thing is—IT IS! (*He gets very near to her.*) If—you'd—been—Mrs.—Calthorpe—Perkins——

PERKINS (*pretending to be frightfully dense*). If—I—had—what *would* have happened?

FERGUS. Well—I'd have gone back home in a submarine—to hide my joy!

(*He turns, very down-hearted, for his hat, and a joyous silent laugh consumes her.*)

PERKINS (*commiserating*). You seem to have struck a vein of bad luck, Mr. Wimbush.

FERGUS. I sure have, Miss Polly—struck it plumb-centre.

(*With his cap in his hand he saunters back to her, and for a moment stands silently gazing at her.*)

FERGUS (*tenderly picking up the edge of her apron*). Guess this is what they call lace?

PERKINS. No, it's embroidery.

FERGUS. Oh, that's embroidery, is it. And what's this? (*Meaning the material of the apron itself.*) Twill?

PERKINS (*laughingly*). No! That's—er—well, I think it's nainsook really.

FERGUS. Nainsook really! What a nice lot I'm getting to know about haberdashery, aren't I?

(He drops the apron and she smooths it out. He fiddles with his cap, and the adorable little witch fiddles with his heart.)

Say! I heard some one singing in the house this morning, just as it was getting light. Who was it?

PERKINS. I don't know—unless it was Mr. Robert—or me—I sometimes hum a bit—when I'm busy.

FERGUS *(closer, more fervently)*. It was a beautiful voice, the sort of voice one hears in dreams. As if an angel were singing in the dawn and trying not to wake the birds. And it wasn't the song of a woman who was busy.

PERKINS. No?

FERGUS *(shaking his head slowly. Intensely)*. It came from a woman who was—happy.

PERKINS *(glorified)*. Aha! Then it couldn't have been me!

FERGUS. I must have been dreaming. *(More intense still as he bends nearer her eyes.)* And I was wishing some—too. *(He stops.)*

PERKINS *(bravely, looking straight at him)*. What were you wishing, Mr. Wimbush?

FERGUS. I was wishing I could take that voice back home, and hear it in my woods.

(And slowly going up he pulls on his cap and goes away.)
Exit WIMBUSH.)

(Her glance follows the exit. She creeps up cautiously behind the window, eyes aflame. She turns, and triumph is in her eyes, and out of an unconscious throat she trills and sings quite softly, crossing at once to her flowers. A moment later FERGUS is seen to peep anxiously round the casement—the voice has reached him and love has brought him back to it. He stands enraptured. A vase of flowers is ready for its place, and as she holds it and determines where it shall go, FERGUS withdraws as silently as he came, and PERKINS takes

the bowl to her writing-table. The trilling still continues. The door opens quite quietly and PRIESTLEY stands in the doorway, his silk hat on his head and his hands still gloved. He only sees the back of a servant, but the voice is the voice of MRS. CALTHORPE, and he remains bewildered. PERKINS has heard the door open and she thinks it's MARTHA.)

PERKINS (*without turning*). You haven't brought me any water, Martha.

(Still mystified, PRIESTLEY presses the door shut, and PERKINS thinks MARTHA has gone back for the water. She continues her trilling, but it is more spasmodic as PRIESTLEY edges to get a side view of her. Another bowl is ready, and as she turns with it to the sideboard she discovers PRIESTLEY and just for an instant she's baffled, but his pitiful look of bewilderment is rather comic and she roars. He removes his hat.)

Er—er—Mrs. Calthorpe is away for a day or two, sir.

PRIESTLEY (*glaring*). So it seems.

PERKINS. —And won't be back for a month.

(She passes him and places the bowl of flowers on sideboard.)

PRIESTLEY. I wonder if Mrs. Calthorpe would object to me waiting—for that month?

PERKINS. She would object very much, I'm sure.

PRIESTLEY. So am I sure.

(He crosses to fireplace and very slowly takes off his gloves. She attends to her flowers and he smacks one glove viciously on the other.)

May I ask who you are?

PERKINS (*pertly*). I'm Perkins, the new parlourmaid.

PRIESTLEY. Oh yes!

(He puts his gloves into the tail pocket of his frockcoat.)

PERKINS. May I ask in which capacity you appear this time? Guardian, trustee, uncle-by-marriage, or legal adviser?

PRIESTLEY (*warming up*). In neither. I am now a bewildered and disillusioned microbe.

PERKINS. Bobby says I'm a topping parlourmaid. What do you think?

PRIESTLEY. I've given up thinking. Last night I received a telegram. This telegram.

(*He produces a telegram from his waistcoat pocket, and hands it to her folded. She takes it coldly, flattens it out with careful foolery, reads it grimly, smiles and hands it back.*)

PERKINS. And so you thought you'd better come on and investigate?

PRIESTLEY. Exactly. (*He puts on his pince-nez and reads the telegram pompously.*) "The Calthorpe business is right off. Nothing doing. Will see you in a day or two. Wimbush." (*As he refolds the telegram.*) That sounds remarkably like the classic phrasing of Master Bobby, inspired by the fertile brain of the new parlourmaid—Perkins, I think you said.

PERKINS (*checking her laughter by scratching her chin*). It's a lovely morning, isn't it? (*Back to flowers.*) I do hope you won't be in to meals, sir. Teignmouth can cater for normal appetites, but—er—what do disillusioned microbes feed on as a rule?

PRIESTLEY. Rats! (*Furiously bursting out.*) What the devil is the meaning of this tomfoolery?

PERKINS (*holding up both hands in mock horror*). Now, Nunkie, Nunkie! If you start off like this you'll never keep it up for four whole weeks! (*With delicious pertness.*) If there's any cause of complaint, you can write to my mistress—with pleasure.

(*PRIESTLEY, groaning with fury, clasps his hand to his brow and struggles to casement in despair. She glories in his torment. Drumming the devil's tattoo with his feet, returns and plumps a chair furiously down in the centre of the room.*)

PRIESTLEY. Sit down!

(She actually smiles—it maddens him.)

Sit down !

(He points a commanding finger at the chair, and fooling for all she's worth she sidles into it like a naughty child. He bends down, nearly sticking his face into hers.)

I've made a mistake with you. I've treated you like a sane grown-up woman. You're an incorrigible, insufferable, incomprehensible vixen.

(She pretends to be scared and clutches each side of the chair seat.)

You—ought—to be—smacked. And you ought to be smacked on a part of your anatomy which at the moment is inaccessible. *(Shrieking it.)* Smacked ! *(And he smacks one hand over the other.)* That's what—you—want ! *(And he stands back an instant to get his breath—then he has another try.)* Where on earth is your sense of dignity ? Where—is—it ?

(She looks blank, then glares round about until her eyes drop on the floor in case the dignity is there. When she again looks up she can't restrain her laughter at his ridiculous anger.)

PERKINS. Aha-ha-ha-ha ! You ought to have been a Member of Parliament, Nunkie. A few more humorists like you and the House of Commons would be a place of real entertainment. *(She rises slowly and pulls down her apron and adjusts her cap.)* Now you sit down.

(He gasps. She clutches his sleeve.)

Come along—come along.

(He jerks his sleeve out of her clutch.)

If—you—want—to—discuss business with me—you'll get in that chair, or I won't say a word.

PRIESTLEY *(seeing that she means it)*. Very well, I will. *(He does, and crosses one leg over the other.)* Now then—I'm waiting, and I warn you my patience is very nearly exhausted.

PERKINS. First of all,—again you haven't kissed me, and you owe me one for Tuesday. (*She bends deliberately to him.*)

PRIESTLEY (*warning her off*). I won't do anything of the kind.

PERKINS (*sticking her cheek in a kissable position*). Come on! come on!

PRIESTLEY (*wriggling off the chair and retreating for safety round the flower table*). I won't! I refuse! What on earth would a passer-by think if he caught me kissing a cap and apron?

PERKINS. If my experience of passers-by is of any value, he'd be infernally sorry it wasn't himself.

PRIESTLEY. Paugh!

PERKINS (*craftily*). Do you mean to tell me you've never kissed a cap and apron?

PRIESTLEY. How dare you? *How—dare—you!*

PERKINS. That's no answer to my question. (*Mimicking a Counsel at the Bar.*) I put it to you. On—your—oath—sir, have you or have you *never* kissed a skivvy?

PRIESTLEY (*stumbling*). N-n-never!

PERKINS (*pat*). I don't believe you—and I shan't play. (*She turns her back on him.*)

(*For a moment he's bluffed out. Then he approaches her on another tack.*)

PRIESTLEY (*standing over her. In quite a calm and conciliatory voice*). Leila!

PERKINS (*wriggling her shoulder from his touch like a petulant child*). No—I shan't play. If I'm not fascinating enough to be kissed, as—as—all first-class parlour-maids expect to be—I'm no longer of any interest to you.

(*She wanders to casement window with her little nose in the air. She aimlessly looks this way and that. She sees some one in the distance and joyously waves to him. PRIESTLEY, nettled, strides up to casement door to investigate.*)

PRIESTLEY. That's Mr. Wimbush, surely!

(She doesn't deign to answer.)

It is Wimbush. *(Dashes back to her.)* Am I to understand that—that—that—does Wimbush believe you to be Perkins and *not* Mrs. Calthorpe?

PERKINS *(quite unruffled by such an absurd question)*. Of course.

PRIESTLEY *(almost inarticulate in his fury)*. Then I'm a bigger idiot than ever.

PERKINS. Nobody doubts it. Coming down to peaceful little Teignmouth, with your absurd Gray's Inn heroics, and your—your high-falutin' legal airs. Ergh! What is it you men actually want of us? You bring us into the world without consulting us. You train us as it pleases you, and if we believe our own ears you train us very badly. We're not permitted to marry the men we select but the men who select us, and when we die we never have the chance of selecting our own tombstone. You know it's getting comic. We darn your socks, and make your beds, and cook your food, and wash up. Can't we even call our hearts our own?

(Quite calmly she leaves him, completely bewildered.)

PRIESTLEY *(making another attempt)*. Leila! I—er—I climb down, and I sit down. *(He does, and very meekly.)*

PERKINS. A—h! *(She picks up a hassock.)* Now we can talk sanely.

(She flings the hassock at his feet, moves it into position with her foot, and kneels on it. She adjusts her dress. All the foolery is gone. When she commences her voice has a serious ring in it.)

At what age do you consider a woman capable of managing her personal affairs?

PRIESTLEY. With discretion and wisdom?

PERKINS. Naturally.

PRIESTLEY. At no age. I dare say such a woman has existed—I can only say I have never met her.

PERKINS (*pointedly*). You mean that ?

PRIESTLEY. I do. (*Emphatically.*) I have never known a woman who—off her own bat—has been capable of managing her life. It isn't a condemnation—women are physically—and mentally not—er—balanced to a—to judge things—dispassionately.

(*She smiles grimly.*)

That amuses you.

PERKINS (*shaking her pretty head*). It frightens me.

PRIESTLEY. And it frightens level-headed old lawyers when they try.

PERKINS. That's why *you* tried to drive me into marrying Mr. Winkley, perhaps ?

PRIESTLEY. That's why I tried to make you see the wisdom of it.

PERKINS (*almost fiercely*). And that's why you're trying to—*bully* me into marrying Mr. Wimbush.

PRIESTLEY. Precisely—if you call it bullying.

PERKINS. Then I think you've gone to work in a very clumsy way. (*Turns to him.*) It's a good many years since I first came under your charge, isn't it ?

PRIESTLEY. Yes.

PERKINS. And I've always been a handful. And—a terrible nuisance, haven't I ?

PRIESTLEY (*gallantly*). Well—er——

PERKINS. Haven't I ?

PRIESTLEY (*hedging*). You've certainly been a great concern to me.

PERKINS. And when you married me to Dick Calthorpe you thought you'd done me a very good turn, didn't you ?

PRIESTLEY. It wasn't a bad opening for a girl left in the circumstances in which you were left.

PERKINS (*without a pause*). Did it ever occur to you that my marriage was a blunder ?

PRIESTLEY. To be candid, I—er—I thought towards the end of it that it wasn't quite—er—not quite——

PERKINS. It wasn't—quite. I could never have

believed that marriage could be such a hell—to a woman.

PRIESTLEY (*astounded*). You astound me. You never hinted——

PERKINS. White women don't talk about such things. It was four years of—misery. Solid complete misery. (*Her eyes drop.*)

PRIESTLEY (*amazed*). Leila!

PERKINS (*smothering her emotion*). You didn't know that, did you? Men never do discover the agony some of us go through. (*The touch of real and intense tragedy.*) You never dreamed that one night I—one night I nearly ended it.

PRIESTLEY. My—poor—Leila!

PERKINS (*quickly mastering herself—remorselessly*). There's going to be no more bullying—no more persuasion—no more——

PRIESTLEY (*intensely*). None!

PERKINS (*smiling sadly at his terrible seriousness*). But you needn't get scared about it, Nunkie. I'm not indifferent to a fortune especially when it's a large one, but if Mr. Wimbush wants Mrs. Calthorpe he must first want Polly Perkins, and to want Polly Perkins is to sacrifice Leila Calthorpe and all she means to him. (*With fine rapture.*) And if Fergus Wimbush had a hundred millions I wouldn't marry him unless I was sure. And that's my—little—game. (*She snuggles her head upon his shoulder.*)

PRIESTLEY (*softly*). And what are your feelings towards him?

PERKINS. I'll tell you in a day or two.

PRIESTLEY. And what will he think when he discovers the deception you've played on him?

PERKINS (*whispering it naïvely*). I'll tell you that also in a day or two. (*Kneeling up.*) You don't believe in me?

PRIESTLEY. I don't altogether believe in your method. It's dangerous. The world claims to have done with sentiment—that only means it has done with honesty and truth, and that knavery has taken the place of

chivalry. However, you're entitled to your whim (*with a silly little chuckle*) and to your Wimbush.

(*They both roar at the point. He is convulsed and nearly falls off his chair.*)

Did you hear what I said? You're entitled to your whim and to your Wimbush. Aha-ha!

(*She snatches the handkerchief from his pocket to wipe her eyes.*)

That's the cleverest thing I've heard for quite a while—your whim and your——

PERKINS (*thumping him*). Shut up.

(*He seeks for his handkerchief and eventually discovers it with her.*)

PRIESTLEY (*recovering it*). After you—thanks. (*Relieved.*) As I was saying (*rising*) you're entitled to your Wimbush if you want him, but if a sounder and steadier noddle than your own may be of any service——

(*He opens his arms to her and she flies into their embrace.*)

PERKINS. You dear old thing.

(*Flinging her arms round his neck she kisses him affectionately as FERGUS WIMBUSH coming in smartly is startled by the embrace and involuntarily coughs. Both the culprits turn their glances guiltily up and he diplomatically retreats again.*)

PRIESTLEY (*sotto voce*). Damn!

PERKINS (*unable to keep serious under the absurdity of their plight*). That's exactly my feelings.

PRIESTLEY (*greatly concerned, rather fatuously*). I'd better explain at once.

PERKINS (*quickly*). No! No! (*Motioning him off.*) Go right away.

(*He quickly goes out door. She gets busy, and puts on a merry little hum, as she replaces hassock and chair, and then gathers the faded flowers on the table and puts them into basket.*)

(FERGUS looks round and seeing the coast is clear enters.)

FERGUS (*unable to hide his chagrin*). I'm awfully sorry I disturbed you, but I—I came in for the Railway Guide.

PERKINS (*pointing to MRS. CALTHORPE'S table*). It's in the rack, sir.

FERGUS (*discovering it*). Sure! (*Opens it*.) I didn't know Mr. Priestley was in Teignmouth.

PERKINS. He came down in consequence of your telegram. He didn't know Mrs. Calthorpe was away.

FERGUS (*angrily*). And was evidently pleased to find that she was.

PERKINS (*with a little snort of defiance*). No! Oh! No! (*A pause*.) Does it shock you very much to find a—a parlourmaid embracing a highly respectable and elderly legal gentleman?

FERGUS (*largely*). Not at all. I don't know the customs of the country, and if I did, I guess it's no concern of mine.

PERKINS. Aha! that's just what I was thinking.

FERGUS (*greatly hipped but trying not to show it, laughs rather stupidly*). Erh! Erha-ha! Aha-ha-ha-ha-ha! (*And he viciously turns to the guide and thrashes over the pages to her unfeigned delight*.)

PERKINS (*bluffing superbly, goes to his assistance*). Can't you find the place?

FERGUS. It seems all places to me.

PERKINS (*taking the guide*). What is it you want?

FERGUS (*quite furious*). I want to know how I can get out of this darned hole, as quickly as I can get out.

PERKINS. That's very easy. (*Turns pages*.) Are you going up or down?

FERGUS. I'm raving mad, so I'd better go up. (*Her suavity drives him crazy*.)

PERKINS. Then you look for T's—here we are—Tamworth—Tanningholt—Twickenham—Teignmouth. Up trains 1.20—that's no good. 3.37. (*A glance at the clock*.) You can catch that nicely. Then 5.27 and 7.49 the last. (*She looks at him quite unconcerned to find him devouring her*.)

FERGUS (*with subdued fury*). I'll catch 'em all.

(She calmly closes the guide and replaces it.)

(As she passes him to go back c. he stops her.) PERKINS !
When Mr. Bob when out the other day calling "Martha"
you—er—you went out after him—what for?

PERKINS. Do you really want to know?

FERGUS. I do.

PERKINS. Well, Martha is young and not at all bad-looking. Mr. Bob is also young, very reckless, and very good-looking. *(Passing on to the flower table with a big sigh.)* And Teignmouth is very, very dull, Mr. Wimbush.

FERGUS. That's exactly what I thought, and yet I catch you——

(She darts an amused glance at him.)

I say I catch you in the arms of a grey-haired old sinner old enough to be——

PERKINS *(picking him up)*. Mr. Priestley is certainly grey-haired and certainly old, but he's not necessarily a grey-haired old sinner. *(Quite indignantly and bang in his face.)* He's a highly respectable man. He's a J.P., a member of the Licensing Committee of the C.C., a D.D., and sometimes even an M.U.G. And what's more he's a very old friend of mine, if I may say so. He's what the Law calls my guardian—he's been a father to me since I was eight, and I've kissed him hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of times.

FERGUS *(greatly relieved, with wide-open eyes)*. Well, why didn't you say so? That alters things considerably.

PERKINS *(with fine scorn)*. Alters what things?

FERGUS *(rather frozen)*. Well—er—trains, and things. I—I—I mean there's no violent hurry now——

PERKINS *(indignantly, pretending not to understand him)*. Violent hurry!

FERGUS. N-n-now that I know there's nothing wrong between you and Mr. Priestley.

PERKINS *(really aroused)*. Mr. Wimbush, I think you forget yourself.

FERGUS *(hopelessly)*. Well, is there?

PERKINS (*scornfully*). Augh! (*She turns as if to go out of casement.*)

FERGUS (*desperately, up after her*). Perkins! Perkins! I can't stand it. I'm not in a fit condition to be excited. I'm flinging a huge fortune into the gutter because I'm a man and not a monkey, and I tell you, Perkins, I must have sympathy from some one.

(*PERKINS goes right out, with her nose in the air. He is frantic.*)

Perkins!

(*Exit PERKINS casement turning right, followed excitedly by FERGUS. PRIESTLEY enters craftily from door, slyly peeps after the couple, then turns in and in his glee skips about.*)

PRIESTLEY (*singing softly as he skips*). "On the top of a tree sat a little tom-tit, singing willow, tit-willow tit-willow. And I said to him——"

(*Just as he turned down ROBERT came across window and stood in casement laughing at the couple off. On hearing PRIESTLEY he enters, and PRIESTLEY turning discovers him and immediately recovers his dignity.*)

ROBERT. Hullo! I didn't know you were down. Beach House seems busy. What's up with you, sir?

PRIESTLEY (*rubbing his hands with glee*). I've just been eavesdropping. Leila is a remarkably advanced and able woman.

ROBERT (*with a chuckle*). She is.

PRIESTLEY (*vastly surprised*). I'd no idea. I thought she was rather a hair-brain. The subtlety of her reasoning is astonishing. Her—er—aplomb, her—her insight into human nature, her powers of deduction are positively brilliant. She's a born bamboozler.

ROBERT. Aha-ha-ha!

PRIESTLEY (*amusedly anxious*). Where are they?

ROBERT. Fergie is crazy for sympathy. I guess she's drawn him off to administer a dose.

PRIESTLEY. Yes, I heard that, but where? She

surely wouldn't walk out on the public highway in that get-up?

ROBERT. Oh, don't you fidget. Whenever Leila wants to administer sympathy, she takes her victim to a nice quiet spot with an old-world sundial, or a rocky eminence overlooking the blue eternal sea or something. (*He is at sideboard. Sighs.*) Have a drink? (*He gets one.*)

PRIESTLEY. Thank you, I will. (*In ecstatic joy sitting L. of table.*) What—a—what part are you playing in this delightful comedy?

ROBERT (*rather hipped*). I'm the funny man. (*Sitting R. of table.*) I keep covey to cover the absence of Mrs. Calthorpe, take letters to Little Titten to get the right post-mark, and generally bolster things up by juicy little fairy-tales. You know I'm becoming a most accomplished liar. Never mind.

(PRIESTLEY puts out his hand to take the glass as ROBERT picks it up himself.)

ROBERT (*drinking*). Chin chin! Happy days.

PRIESTLEY (*watching the liquor disappear*). Gone for ever.

ROBERT. What puzzles me is—how is it going to end.

PRIESTLEY. Y-e-s! But I think we'd better not trouble ourselves about that. When do you return home?

ROBERT. The instant I'm no longer wanted. (*Warmly.*) Now you see! If anything comes of this they'll give me the Icy Mitt without even a thank you.

PRIESTLEY (*fogged*). What is the Icy Mitt?

ROBERT. The pathognomic antithesis of the Glad Eye.

PRIESTLEY (*chuckling*). Well, it sounds all right, and I seem to have heard of the Glad Eye. (*Thinks.*) Where *have* I heard of the Glad Eye?

ROBERT. Oh, chuck it, old chap. I know you're a churchwarden, but you don't go to the South of France every year for a month without getting at least one stain on your character.

PRIESTLEY (*rather astonished, rising*). I think, my young friend, you forget the years that separate us.

ROBERT. Oh no, I don't! If I wear as well as you've done I shall be frightfully bucked when I'm sixty something—I've heard my mater say you're the best-preserved man in London.

(PRIESTLEY *is immensely pleased. He turns to hide his joy and catching himself in the glass preens his feathers and tucks down his waistcoat and squares his shoulders with rapture.*)

PRIESTLEY (*a thought striking him ; turning erect and very magnificent*). I don't know that I altogether appreciate the word "preserved"!

ROBERT. That's the word she used—and what a mother of eleven children, all living, doesn't know about preserving isn't much. (*He has roamed up.*) O—h! but I'm so bored. For the last three days I've been doing nothing but walk in and out of this infernal casement.

(*He looks at PRIESTLEY, but PRIESTLEY's hands are under the tails of his coat, his eyes are up to heaven and he's in joyous cogitation. ROBERT stands and chuckles at him.*)

I suppose you're in for a good fat fee if this thing comes off?

PRIESTLEY (*glaring at him fiercely*). I beg your pardon!

ROBERT (*grinning largely*). I was only suggesting that if this thing——

PRIESTLEY (*furiously*). You were only suggesting, sir—you were only suggesting——

ROBERT. Well, damn it, I don't have to pay anything for suggesting, do I.

PRIESTLEY. Pay, sir—pay! Pay what?

(*Enter PERKINS casement smartly.*)

PERKINS (*naïvely concerned*). What's the fun?

PRIESTLEY (*fuming*). This young gentleman has clearly outgrown his boots.

PERKINS (*diplomatically*). Ah! I feared he was suffering a little from swelled head.

ROBERT. I don't usually wear my boots on my head.

PRIESTLEY. Well, you ought to—your brains appear to be in your feet.

ROBERT (*amusedly catching her eye*). That's distinctly nasty, isn't it?

PERKINS. I think we'd better change the subject. (*Tucking a flower in BOBBIE'S buttonhole.*) Bobby is going to do great things, Nunkie, when once he gets going. Aren't you?

PRIESTLEY. I can tell him his poor mother is very anxious to hear of the start. I fear he doesn't know the meaning of the word "work."

ROBERT. Don't I? The only profitable meaning is the knowledge how to work the oracle on those who do. When I've mastered the tricks of that game I shall probably play it as low down as all the other jokers.

PRIESTLEY (*furious*). I resent that, sir. I consider it a personal reflection.

PERKINS (*soothingly*). Now, gentlemen, gentlemen! if—you—please!

(*Enter MARTHA, closing door carefully behind her.*)

MARTHA (*rather warily to PERKINS*). The two Miss Wimbushes, ma'am.

PERKINS (*scared*). Oh Lord!

MARTHA. I said Mrs. Calthorpe was not at home, and they asked to see Mr. Wimbush.

PERKINS. Where are they?

MARTHA. In the hall, ma'am.

PERKINS. Very well.

(*Exit MARTHA.*)

(*Rather scared*). This thing is getting complicated.

ROBERT (*naïvely*). It looks like *another* exit for Robert—on the grounds of expediency.

PERKINS. You're quite right. Find Fergus and tell him his sisters are here.

ROBERT (*drily*). I thought so.

(*Exit ROBERT, casement.*)

PERKINS. And we can simplify matters by getting rid of you, Nunkie, too. D'you mind?

PRIESTLEY (*superciliously*). Not at all.

PERKINS. What a blessed thing we have a convenient railway service. You can catch the 3.20 nicely.

(PRIESTLEY, *quite annoyed and gathering his hat, crosses to door.*)

PERKINS (*in stage whisper*). This way, dearest. (*Meaning casement.*)

PRIESTLEY (*resentfully*). My umbrella is in the hall.

PERKINS (*taking him up*). Martha will give it you from the front door.

PRIESTLEY (*irritably and defensively*). But I've already met the Misses Wimbush.

PERKINS. I daresay, dear, but we're getting so many side issues at work that I'm getting rather mixed.

PRIESTLEY. Just as you please. I suppose I may take it that I'm not actually wanted.

PERKINS. Not just at present, Nunkie darling. I'll let you know if anything happens.

PRIESTLEY. I thank you. Good afternoon. (*Turns.*)

PERKINS (*injured*). Nunkie!

(*He looks back, grasps the omission of the parting kiss, but declines. She seizes his arm in the doorway.*)

(*Childishly*). Nunkie! I must be fortified. Somebody has got to kiss me and I can't ask Mr. Wimbush yet—can I?

PRIESTLEY (*bending to kiss her cheek*). Oh! I'm so weak.

(*Exit PRIESTLEY. She peeps after him outside and laughs softly. Then goes out into hall.*)

(*Off*). I'm sorry Mrs. Calthorpe is not at home. Please come in. I've sent for Mr. Wimbush.

(PERKINS *re-enters, followed by RUTH and ADA.*)

RUTH (*loftily as she enters*). We'd no idea Mrs. Calthorpe was away.

PERKINS (*closing door after them*). Yes—she's been away for some days.

RUTH (*mystified*). Some days! (*Looks dumbly at her sister.*) O—h!

(*An awkward pause. ADA roams about curious and up to casement.*)

PERKINS. Can I get you some lunch? If you're just off the train—

RUTH. Oh, thank you—we had a basket put in at Yeovil.

PERKINS. Perhaps you'd like to go to Mrs. Calthorpe's room. I think Mr. Wimbush has gone off along the cliffs.

RUTH (*sitting majestically on couch*). No, I think we'd better just wait for Mr. Wimbush, thank you.

ADA (*coming down, joyously*). Are you Perkins?

PERKINS. Yes, miss.

ADA. My brother said something about you in his letter. I wondered. (*Another pause.*) You don't know which way my brother went, do you?

RUTH (*taking her gloves off*). Oh, I think we'll wait, Ada. (*To PERKINS.*) Some one has gone for him, you said.

PERKINS. Yes—Mr. Robert. He can't be far away.

(PERKINS *accepts dismissal and turns to door.*)

(*To RUTH.*) You'll hardly be returning to London to-night. I didn't see any luggage in the hall.

RUTH. Well, no—we didn't—er—

ADA (*cutting in*). As a matter of fact, Perkins, we did, but we thought it wise to leave it in the cloak-room at the railway depôt.

RUTH (*annoyed*). Ada!

ADA. In case we weren't invited to stay.

PERKINS (*tickled*). Then if you'll give me the ticket I'll have it sent for. The mistress would be greatly offended if you did not stay here. I can only offer you one bedroom between two.

ADA. That's just ripping of you, Perkins. (*She has dived into her bag for ticket.*) Of course we'll stay. We came down in the hope we should be asked to stay. (*Hands ticket to the smiling PERKINS.*) Didn't we, Ruth?

RUTH (*with dignity*). You will please not allow yourself, Perkins, to be shocked by my sister.

PERKINS (*at door*). Oh no, miss, thank you. It takes a great deal of this sort of thing to shock Devonshire.

(*She is swinging out again and has the door wide open when ADA chirps in again.*)

ADA. What do we do when we're ready to go to our room—whistle?

PERKINS (*silently convulsed*). Yes—if you prefer it to ringing the bell.

(*Exit PERKINS.*)

ADA. It feels a bit freezy, doesn't it?

RUTH (*looking quizzingly about*). Most extraordinary! Not been here for some days, she said. Then what is Fergus doing? What does it mean?

ADA. I suppose the darling hasn't cottoned to poor old Fergie, and has escaped.

RUTH. Then why is he staying on?

ADA. Give it up! I'm not worrying! (*Roams up.*) They're as independent as hogs on ice, these English people, but I wish they'd let us have some of their servants. Guess this one would make some of us a bit shabby.

(*A call of "Ahoy!" is heard some distance off. "Ahoy!" It is ROBERT'S voice. The girls prick up their ears and ADA rushes to casement and gives the prairie call in answer.*)

RUTH. Who is it?

ADA (*excitedly*). A man—a young man—coming along the beach. He's running, guess he's on the bee line for home.

Another "Ahoy!" much nearer and ADA darts back as ROBERT bursts in.)

ROBERT (*as he enters*). Can't see anything of him. (*Discovers the visitors and pulls up.*) O—h!

ADA (*grinning largely*). How d'you do?

ROBERT (*bowing and coming in further, giggling nervously*). How d'you do? Are—are—you—Canada?

ADA (*jumping up*). Yep!

ROBERT. I'm Bob.

ADA (*sticking out her hand*). I thought you were. Put it right there. I'm Ada. Ruth! This is Bob.

ROBERT (*his hand to RUTH*). Put it right there.

RUTH (*deigning the tenth part of a nod*). How d'you do? We're sorry Mrs. Calthorpe isn't at home. We'd no idea of it.

ROBERT. No. Nobody seems to have any idea of it.

RUTH. I thought she was entertaining my brother.

ROBERT. Oh! I'm entertaining him. (*To ADA.*) And Fergie's a sport—he's a—a—a top-holer.

ADA (*rapturously*). You think he is, Bob?

ROBERT. I do—ADA!

ADA (*smashing him on the shoulder and letting her arm rest there*). Bully! (*The arm tickles him and he just loves it.*)

RUTH (*freezingly*). You will understand, Mr.—er—did I catch your surname?

ROBERT. Gilmour. (*A grin.*)

RUTH. Mr. Gilmour. You'll understand, I hope, that my sister is a child of the woods——

ADA. Oh, come off it, Ruth.

RUTH. —And is not an average Canadian girl by any means.

ROBERT. I'm so glad—I should probably detest the average Canadian girl.

ADA. Ha! ha!

ROBERT. Of course I—I—I didn't mean that—What I meant was that—that the average girl is like the happy medium—neither one thing or the other.

ADA. Like you, Sonny—a bit mixed.

ROBERT. And a frightful ass. (*To ADA.*) I say, I was going to run up to the Coastguard Station. I'll bet Fergus is there.

ADA (*smartly*). Then let's both go. (*Flings her bag and gloves on armchair.*) I've got awfully silly shoes on for running. (*She squats and tucks her finger in the heel of one shoe.*)

ROBERT (*in a dream*). I guess those little feet would do well in any sort of shoe.

(*RUTH squirms with disgust.*)

ADA (*peeping up at him*). You've kissed the Blarney Stone, Robert. (*Jumps up, flings off her hat and her coat.*) I shall bet you a pair of gloves I reach the guard's house before you do. How far is it?

ROBERT. Half a mile.

ADA. Just my distance. Is it on?

ROBERT (*naïvely*). I'd rather make it a box of chocolates, a small box if you don't mind. I'm frightfully broke.

ADA. Then we'll race for love.

(*She stands up in skirt and jersey, a fine, breezy Canadian, and he admires her immensely.*)

Come on.

(*They both run out.*)

ROBERT. Here's Fergie coming from the opposite direction.

ADA. We needn't see him.

ROBERT. All right. We must dash for it.

(*And both run off away to left.*)

(*A moment later FERGUS appears at casement eagerly looking in the direction the runners have taken. He looks in and discovers RUTH.*)

FERGUS (*collapsing against the doorpost*). Oh, my ears and little whiskers. (*Enters.*) Then it *was* Ada. What on earth brings you here?

RUTH. You promised to wire how things were going. There was nothing on Wednesday; we waited anxiously all day yesterday, and your letter this morning said nothing. So we decided to come down and burst in on Mrs. Calthorpe. You never could be trusted to manage anything yourself—could you?

FERGUS (*roughly*). Well—it's off, right off, so you've had a wasted journey.

RUTH. Fergus! (*Alarmed.*) What's happened?

FERGUS. Just nothing. I haven't even seen the lady.

RUTH (*great staring eyes*). Not—seen—her?

FERGUS. I'm waiting—out of politeness. There she is. (*He points to the fatal photograph of Mrs. HUBBARD on the mantelpiece.*)

(RUTH *creeps wonderingly towards it.*)

And if you or anybody guess I'm going to lock myself up with that for the rest of my life, you're mistaken. (*He roams.*)

(RUTH *stares in blank astonishment at the portrait before lifting it slowly down.*)

RUTH. It—certainly—is—a most extraordinary face.

FERGUS. There are bits of it which are positively dangerous.

RUTH. But, Fergus—photographs are often very deceiving, I shouldn't make up my mind either way until at least I'd met her. She may have a most beautiful nature.

FERGUS (*with emphasis*). That's where I get skeered. A woman with a beautiful nature and a face like that ought to be put out of her misery.

RUTH (*warmly*). But, Fergus, sacrifices have to be made in this world.

FERGUS. I know, but I see no particular reason for this one.

RUTH. How can you say such a thing ?

FERGUS (*getting very ratty*). Well, I won't argue, and we're not going to have a scene in this woman's own house. You're troubled about my promise to you and Ada. I—I confess it's just rough on you ! But what you never have you never miss, and I'm willing for you to share up the ten thousand that must come to me.

RUTH (*turning fiercely*). Augh ! You always were impossible ! (*She replaces the photograph upon the mantel-piece.*)

FERGUS. The whole thing is mighty impossible, and I'm through. If Uncle Ben wanted to benefit the lady he could have done so without ratting me.

RUTH. Yes ! yes ! I agree, but there's more ways of catching a fish than by hooking it. You've said women never attracted you.

FERGUS. That's what I—said !

RUTH. I don't want to suggest it, but surely some convenient arrangement might be made to comply with the conditions without—er—without sacrificing *anything*.

(*He groans.*)

As she's a widow she probably doesn't care much about *living* with a man, even when she's married to one, and as you don't care two straws whether you have a wife or not——

FERGUS. Who says—I don't care two straws ?

RUTH (*staring at him*). Do you ?

(*He is too amazed to move or answer, he simply stares at her.*)

Do you, Fergus ?

FERGUS. Well, I can't tell, can I, until I've seen this one ; guess the first husband died of complicated remorse, but what beats me——

RUTH (*viciously*). Everything beats you.

FERGUS. I was remarking what beats me is how she fascinated Uncle Ben, and wherever he is I'm going after him to find out.

RUTH. If I were a man the fact that Uncle Ben *was* fascinated would give me encouragement.

FERGUS. It freezes me up.

RUTH. Augh!

FERGUS. Young Robert—her own cousin—admits he wouldn't marry it if she were the only woman left on earth.

RUTH (*majestically*). Fergus—you're in love elsewhere.

FERGUS (*from casement*). Well—perhaps I am, and perhaps I'm not.

RUTH. Ah! I thought so. We've been in England *eight* days. You haven't lost much time, have you? (*Furious.*) Who—on—earth is she?

FERGUS. D'auh!

(*As he is dashing out casement PERKINS enters door.*)

PERKINS (*to RUTH, very sweetly*). I'm hurrying on tea because I know you ladies must want a cup. Martha will show you to your room. I'm sure you'd like to take your things off.

RUTH. Thank you, I would; but, Perkins, tell me, is your mistress really as plain as her photograph makes out?

PERKINS. No, she isn't—it's a libel.

RUTH. I'm glad of that. It makes her look quite old. I understood she was a *young* widow.

PERKINS (*in a fix*). She's—very—sweet in herself.

RUTH. But her age—what is it?

PERKINS (*getting deeper in*). O—h! Forty-five, perhaps.

(FERGUS *grins triumphantly.*)

RUTH. What?

PERKINS. N—o! *thirty-five* or something—I don't know. It's so difficult when people won't tell you, isn't it?

RUTH. But you say she's sweet.

PERKINS. Yes, she is—she's a darling to live with when you—when you stroke her down the right way.

RUTH. No children, I think?

PERKINS. A daughter.

FERGUS (*with a groan, dashing out*). Bunkered.

(*Exit FERGUS.*)

PERKINS. N—o! No children. I was thinking of somebody else. (*Thinking of escape.*) I think I'd better tell Martha to pour the tea off the leaves.

RUTH. Oh, leave the leaves—tell me more about Mrs. Calthorpe. It's no use beating about the bush, Perkins. I daresay you've heard—something. If my brother and your mistress marry they divide a very large fortune and we girls get a share of it. Unfortunately Mr. Wimbush has taken a keen dislike to her already and things are going badly—

PERKINS (*naïvely*). Are they?

RUTH. Very badly. (*Pointedly.*) What possessed her to bolt when she knew my brother was calling to see her the other day?

PERKINS (*big staring eyes*). Did she? I—I—I can't imagine the missus bolting from a man, especially from Canada.

RUTH. But she did. Is she a nervous creature?

PERKINS. She sulks a bit sometimes, and I've heard her say— (*Stops, then whispers it confidentially.*) I've heard her say "damn."

RUTH (*brushing it irritably aside*). That doesn't matter, is she lively? (*Desperate.*) Would she make an ordinary man ordinarily happy?

PERKINS. You bet she would if she tried. Look here, Miss Wimbush, take my advice—you leave it to her. She probably thinks there's too many partners in the business and is waiting for them to thin out a bit.

RUTH (*aroused*). Indeed! My brother isn't the sort of man to go down on his marrow-bones to a person like Mrs. Calthorpe.

PERKINS (*naïvely*). Then the business is bust.

RUTH (*loftily*). You seem to be pretty sure of yourself.

PERKINS. I'm pretty sure of the missus. I haven't lived with her all these years not to know that she can't

be driven, or kicked into doing anything she doesn't want to do.

RUTH (*highly ruffled crossing to door*). Dear me! I think I'll go upstairs now. Perkins—my brother hasn't met *many* ladies since he came, has he? Many attractive ladies?

PERKINS. Well, he's been up and down the beach a great deal and one never knows what temptations—

RUTH (*stamping her foot in anger*). I'm serious, Perkins. Have you *seen* him with anyone—or heard him speak of any one to Mr. Gilmour, for instance?

PERKINS (*pretending to think*). No, I don't think so. Mr. Wimbush doesn't strike me as being a "giddy" man. Is he?

RUTH. He's an idiot. They're all idiots where women are concerned. I *must* tell you, Perkins—he's going to fling this mighty chance into the sea because some baby face has caught his fancy.

(PERKINS looks pretendingly baffled and stares aghast.)

PERKINS. Who—can—it—be? If it's anybody in Teignmouth he must be a bit of a hustler. (*Minces.*) It—can't—be——?

RUTH. Yes!

PERKINS. It—can't—be—Martha?

(*With a groan of disgust RUTH dashes out. With a joyous silent laugh PERKINS follows as ROBERT and ADA burst in joyously, exhausted from their race. He flings himself full length into armchair, but she's far too fine a man for such weakness. Her cheeks are aflame, her hair has loosened, her boots and stockings and skirt are covered with sand and dust. She makes a glorious picture.*)

ADA. Hip! hip! Tea's coming. (*Turns to her adversary.*) You lazy rascal! (*She pummels him and thumps him.*) Beaten by—a hundred—yards! How do you like it, Britisher?

(*He foolingly squeals for mercy and she leaves him.*)

Lord, I'm hot. (*She puts her hand over her heart and*

is scared.) Say, Bobby, my old bus is doing fifty miles to the gallon. Phew! It won't do, Ada, my chick, you're out of condition. (*Looks round.*) I must have something to drink. (*She goes to sideboard.*) Is this soda water? (*Fingering a syphon.*)

ROBERT (*sitting up*). Yes, but I shouldn't drink soda neat while you're so heated.

(She laughs merrily at him and squirts soda into her glass, turns round and drinks it at one draught.)

ADA. What a weak little teacher's pet you are, Kiddie. You'd never do for Canada. We'd have to sew you up in cotton wool and keep you in an incubator.

ROBERT. Oh—don't you get too high-browed m'lady. I'll give you best at half a mile. I haven't sprinted since I left Oxford, but don't you crow. Can you swim?

ADA (*coming up to him*). Swim—like a fish.

ROBERT. Can you golf?

ADA. What's *your* handicap?

ROBERT. Eight.

ADA. I'll give you a stroke a hole and play you for a set of clubs.

ROBERT. Done. Seven o'clock to-morrow morning.

ADA. Can I wire for my sticks to be sent down to-night?

ROBERT. You can.

ADA. Then I'll play you, young man. I'm the junior open champ of Ontario.

ROBERT. The devil you are!

ADA (*bursting at him*). You'll be *dead broke* before you've done with me, old chap. Is there any other sport you're great in? What about steeple-chasing? I'll ride you bareback across country.

ROBERT (*flinging his hat in amused defiance on the floor*). Just you chuck it, Flapper, you're getting my dander up.

ADA (*joyously rumpling his hair with both hands*). Now you look almost as pretty as I do. I say—our hair

isn't a bad match, is it? *(She has captured a wisp of her rebellious hair and held it up against his.)*

(Enter MARTHA. She sees the flirtation and bangs the door in anger. Goes to dresser for cloth and lays it fiercely over table as the two spot her demeanour and ROBERT withers in the chair.)

ADA *(brightening—to MARTHA)*. Where's Miss Ruth, Martha?

MARTHA *(coldly, without turning from the table)*. She's gone upstairs, Miss.

ADA. I suppose I shall be able to find her.

MARTHA. It's the first door on the left—on the landing.

ADA *(withdrawing)*. Thank you.

(She gives ROBERT a long bewildering look and disappears. Exit ADA closing door after her. ROBERT picks up his hat.)

MARTHA *(with her feathers up)*. I don't know, mind yer, but from what I've seen the last twenty-four hours, we've turned the place into an asylum for kissing.

ROBERT *(highly tickled at her cheek)*. Aha! I'm glad you said "we."

(She gives him a fierce look.)

MARTHA *(marching over to him and squaring up to him)*. I know what you mean. But there's this difference. When a gentleman kisses a girl like me, we know what 'e's up to and we like it because it makes us feel that our flesh ain't dirt any more than 'is is; but when a gentleman kisses an innocent and beautiful young lady who he 'asn't known for more than an hour, and who can't take care of 'erself because she doesn't know what men are or what they can be, 'e's a blackguard.

(He smiles grimly.)

Put that in your pipe and smoke it.

ROBERT *(rising vry slowly and with mock dignity)*. I've nothing to discuss with you, Martha, because you've

made me feel that I owe you an apology. I offer you an apology for having so stupidly made an ass of myself with you the other day. I beg your pardon, Martha. (*Firmly.*) But I want you to know that I did not kiss Miss Wimbush.

(*He sticks on his straw hat into the band of which he has stuck the flower which PERKINS gave him, twists round on his heels and with nose in air marches pompously out as PERKINS enters.*)

PERKINS. Quickly, Martha. What are you doing?

MARTHA (*viciously*). I've just had a bust with somebody.

PERKINS. Oh, which somebody?

MARTHA (*turning, almost in tears*). It doesn't matter, Mum.

(*Exit MARTHA quickly.*)

(*PERKINS puts a bowl of flowers from sideboard to table as FERGUS peeps from casement and enters delighted to find PERKINS alone.*)

FERGUS. What do you think of my sisters, Perkins?

PERKINS. They bring the perfume of the New World with them, Mr. Wimbush. Miss Ruth, the calm and dignity of the serious and sober thing—she's very attractive. Miss Ada has the brilliant joy of life.

FERGUS (*impressed by her astonishing eloquence*). Guess I'd like to hear about that perfume of the New World?

PERKINS (*with rapture*). The smell of the wheat fields and the pines. The aroma of the great lakes, the boundless plains, the glorious winds—the fragrance of—what was it you said? Big hopes! Big thoughts! Big deeds!

FERGUS (*enraptured*). D'you mean that, or is it only what you wonderful English women have trained yourselves to say?

PERKINS. English women never train themselves to be insincere, Mr. Wimbush.

FERGUS. By Heaven, Perkins, how wonderfully you talk.

(*She smiles.*)

Do all domestic servants talk like you ?

PERKINS. A great many, but then I'm not quite a genuine skivvy. (*To fireplace attending to fire.*)

FERGUS. I don't understand that word "skivvy."

PERKINS. I mean I needn't be a servant if I don't want to be, but I think it's ripping. Before I started I never thought domestic life could be so jolly ! so completely fascinating as it *can* be.

FERGUS. And yet I hear that English women have — !

PERKINS. Missed it ! That's true, but they've missed it because men have lured them away from it. My mind has completely changed the last three days about home and all it means. I've never had the management of the house and guests—without Mrs. Calthorpe—before. This is a new experience.

FERGUS. I see.

PERKINS (*turning to him with a touch of genuine nervousness*). Mr. Wimbush, you're forming a wrong opinion of Mrs. Calthorpe. You were talking so loudly just now, we overheard you. She's not nearly such an impossible frump as you think she is.

(*He smiles grimly.*)

It was rather mean of me showing you that photograph.

FERGUS (*without any misgiving*). Oh no, it wasn't.

PERKINS. It was, and I'm sorry I did. When you see her at her best, you'll like her.

FERGUS. May the Lord have mercy on me.

PERKINS (*emphatically*). You will ! And you've got to marry her. (*To door, roguishly.*) You wait.

FERGUS (*masterfully*). Perkins.

(*She turns at door.*)

Come here—please.

(*She goes very slowly to him, meeting him centre.*)

(*Very soberly*). I want you to put your mistress out of

your mind. She's nothing to me—she never can be anything.

PERKINS (*roguishly*). Aha!

FERGUS (*fuming*). I mean it.

(*She drops her eyes and fiddles with her apron.*)

(*Clutching her elbows*). Look at me.

(*Roguishly she twists her face away.*)

(*Sternly*). Look at me, Polly.

(*She does, and as his fingers lovingly take her cheeks RUTH enters.*)

(*On discovering the intrusion, a long groan.*) Oh—my—God.

(*PERKINS laughingly escapes from him and placing chair very carefully at head of table chortles very sweetly to the furious RUTH.*)

POLLY. Tea is ready, Miss.

(*Exit PERKINS, RUTH and FERGUS eyeing each other in defiance. FERGUS with a gesture of disgust majestically takes down the photograph. Deliberately tears it to fragments which he flings to the fire. Slowly takes up a pose of defiance, puts one foot on the stool, puffs out his chest and snorts at his immovable sister.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT III

SAME SCENE

(On the opening of the act FERGUS is discovered earnestly writing at the table. RUTH is standing at the casement looking steadily through a field glass, away to the left.)

RUTH *(quietly)*. Fergus!

(No attention. She lowers the glass and looks round.)

Fergus!

FERGUS *(irritably)*. Hullo!

RUTH. I want you.

FERGUS. I'll get busy in a minute.

(She waits a moment, then she comes down to him.)

RUTH *(irritably)*. I want you to look at the rocks just below the flagstaff, and tell me what you see.

(He takes the glass wearily and goes up—looks away to the left.)

FERGUS. I can't see anything.

RUTH. Not two persons standing close to the cliff? I can almost detect them with the naked eye.

FERGUS. O—h! I thought you meant something peculiar. You're not supposed to spy out couples mooning about the shore.

RUTH *(firmly)*. Look! Look! and don't be so philosophic.

FERGUS *(he looks again)*. Yes! I see two persons. What of it?

RUTH. They're Ada and Mr. Gilmour.

FERGUS *(returning)*. Well. What of it?

RUTH. Haven't you noticed they're madly in love with each other?

FERGUS (*quite rusty*). Well—for the third time—what of it?

RUTH (*pointedly*). Are you going to allow this thing to develop and take no notice? Who is Mr. Gilmour—what is he?

FERGUS (*fuming*). O—h! I've just got a dozen words to put to my letter, then we'll dissect Mr. Gilmour.

(*He regains his seat. She goes again to casement and uses the glass. His letter signed, he blots it with a bang and she returns.*)

(*Taking an envelope.*) Will you touch the bell?

(*She does. He sticks on a stamp. Enter MARTHA.*)

Can you get along with this to the mail box?

MARTHA. Yes, sir, but there's nothing out now until the evening post.

FERGUS (*giving letter*). All right.

RUTH (*as MARTHA is going out*). Is Perkins not returned yet?

MARTHA. Not yet, Miss.

RUTH. Ask her to come to me before she takes off her things, will you. (*Sits top end of table.*)

MARTHA. Yes, Miss.

Exit MARTHA.

FERGUS. Now then! Ada and Bobby are sitting on the rocks together—below the flagstaff. . . . They are madly in love with each other! Are we going to allow this thing to develop? Who is Mr. Gilmour? What—is he? If a herring and a half costs three cents—what's the freight rate of a ton of coal? Gee!

RUTH (*with expressive dignity*). Wonderfully adroit.

FERGUS (*sitting left side of table*). Now, look here, Ruth—I don't want to be rotten, but I'm much too concerned with my own affairs to be worried. Get me?

RUTH. Is there anything connected with your affairs you'd like to consult me about?

FERGUS. Absodamnlutely nothing.

RUTH. Then I'm glad I've already started to bring matters to a head. (*She picks up her handbag.*) This thing is getting delightfully mysterious, and I do just hate mysteries. You've been here a week, Ada and I have been here four days, Mrs. Calthorpe is at a little village only sixteen miles away.

FERGUS (*defensively—but apprehensive*). Attending the bedside of a very old friend.

RUTH. Fudge!

FERGUS (*bewildered*). What do you mean by "Fudge"?

RUTH (*flatly*). I mean that this sick friend is fudge.

FERGUS. Ergh! You'll be asking presently who is Mrs. Calthorpe?

RUTH (*warming up*). I am asking it, and as nobody seems willing to tell me I'm going to find out. (*She takes some papers from the handbag.*) I've just received a note from her.

(FERGUS *greatly excited.*)

You needn't be surprised. It's in answer to one I sent her yesterday. I'd better read them both to you (*reading*).

"Dear Mrs. Calthorpe,—

I am so extremely sorry you are unable to leave the bedside of your friend, but my brother and I are both anxious to see you before we leave, and as it is impossible for us to impose upon your hospitality further, may we not motor over to Little Titten and have a few moments with you?"

FERGUS. An extremely ingenious letter.

RUTH. This is her reply:

"Dear Miss Wimbush,—

I shall indeed be grieved if you leave before I can return home and entertain you personally, but if your patience can possibly hold out another day or so, all I think will be well."

(*She looks up at him.*) "All I think will be well." What do you make of that?

FERGUS. It's quite clear to me, Mrs. Calthorpe is not dying to meet us, and she's banking on our patience *not* holding out.

RUTH (*rising*). Nonsense!

FERGUS. What other construction can you put upon it? She never invited any of us. We're a parcel of cheap intruders and we've got what we asked for.

RUTH. If that were so, her feelings would be reflected in the attitude of Mr. Gilmour and the servants. No one could be sweeter or more hospitable. You're sure she knows the reason of your visit, and what it means to *her*?

FERGUS. Priestley brought me down and detailed the whole business.

RUTH (*questioningly*). And sent you on here *after* he'd seen her.

FERGUS. Sure.

RUTH. And when you arrived a few minutes later, you found her gone?

FERGUS. I did.

RUTH. And you really think there's nothing odd about all this?

FERGUS. It's all just mighty odd. *She's* odd, and our business is odd. It's odd for us to be here at all.

(RUTH, *smiling*, goes to writing table.)

It's odd for you to be sticking your nose where it isn't wanted. Life's odd.

RUTH (*sitting at writing table*). And that's all you've got to say about it!

FERGUS. Except that we've got to clear out as gracefully as we can. And, oh my Lord, what asses we shall feel!

(*Enter PERKINS just back from the village. She is very simply dressed in a country coat and hat, and carries a dainty little wicker basket.*)

PERKINS (*as RUTH turns to her*). I've got the French fastenings—I'm afraid they're not very good but perhaps they'll do, and Miss Ada's lace. (*Hands both.*)

RUTH. Thank you.

PERKINS. Martha says you wanted me.

RUTH. I want this telegram to go to your mistress. (*Takes it from her bag.*) I suppose Mrs. Calthorpe, Little Titten, is sufficient address?

PERKINS (*hipped, but hiding it cleverly*). Er—er—I think so. I've never sent the mistress a telegram to—to—Little Titten.

RUTH (*handing her the wire*). Can you read it?

PERKINS (*naïvely*). I'll try (*reading*). "Mrs. Calthorpe, Little Titten. My brother and I will motor over at ten o'clock to-morrow Tuesday morning. Ruth Wimbush."

(*PERKINS is cornered and gives helplessly a weird little glance of dismay, and it happens to be in FERGUS' direction.*)

FERGUS (*helplessly to RUTH*). You think that's wise?

RUTH. I think it's not unwise. It can't possibly do any mischief.

FERGUS. What does Perkins think about it?

RUTH (*a touch of loftiness*). What should Perkins think about it?

PERKINS. Er—I don't of course know what your object is.

RUTH. Our object is to see Mrs. Calthorpe, who doesn't seem at all anxious to see us, and there's very definite reasons why she should see us, or at least *Mr.* Wimbush. Who is this friend your mistress is nursing—d'you know?

PERKINS. Er—no, Miss, I don't. She has so many friends all about.

RUTH (*definitely*). Well—we'll send the telegram and see what happens anyway—I suppose there are motors to be had at the station hotel?

PERKINS. Taxis—oh yes!

RUTH. Thank you, Perkins—if you'll take it as soon as you can.

PERKINS (*turning*). I—er—I think I'll send Martha at once.

RUTH. If you would, please—she has a letter to post for Mr. Wimbush.

(Exit PERKINS. FERGUS flies to door and opens it for her without RUTH's knowledge.)

RUTH (on the closing of the door). Now a word about Ada.

(FERGUS is looking into hall after his adored one. RUTH discovers him. Roughly.)

Fergus! I want to talk about Ada.

FERGUS. Oh, bother Ada! I mean bother you. Do what you like. Ask Gilmour what he is and who he is. Ask him who Nebuchadnezzar was, but for the love of Mike don't worry me. (Flatly.) I shall leave for London first train in the morning. You can go to Little Titten alone, and if you see Mrs. Calthorpe, give her my kindest regards and tell her I wish to Heaven I'd never heard of her. (Rudely and furiously.) Where's—my—pipe? (He started frantically looking for it on "Nebuchadnezzar.")

RUTH (lifting pipe from writing table and taking it to him.) Here's your pipe, Fergus.

(He takes it with a snatch, and ferrets for his hat. Finds it and sticks it on his head.)

FERGUS. I'm sorry I've been boorish, but you're worrying some.

(She smiles grimly.)

I know it's just rotten luck for you and Ada that things have not gone our way, but . . .

RUTH. You haven't *tried* to bring them our way. You're not even willing to drive over to Little Titten in the morning to see Mrs. Calthorpe.

FERGUS (firmly). I am not. I don't want to see Mrs. Calthorpe. I've seen her head and shoulders and I'll take the rest on trust. Priestley warned me she was not a woman to jump at any man—no matter what was hanging to him, and by Heaven, she hasn't jumped, has

she, and so between the two of us the City of Toronto gets the nest egg instead of me.

RUTH. Is that your only reason?

FERGUS. I guess it's sufficient.

RUTH (*fixing him with her eye*). Fergus—I know more than you think I do.

FERGUS. Bully for you then. I am *not* moving another inch in the direction of the lady whom Uncle Ben pronounced the most wonderful woman he'd ever met. His judgment wasn't high grade, for I've met a better.

RUTH (*rising, expressively*). Ah! Now we're getting at it.

FERGUS. And I'm getting out of it.

(*He darts out through the casement, turning sharp to the right. Exit FERGUS.*)

(*Twilight has come, and right out on the horizon there is the beginning of a fine sunset which gradually increases as the Act continues. For a moment RUTH looks blankly on the exit, then very dejected she rings the bell. Enter PERKINS, now in cap and apron again.*)

RUTH. I rang for Martha, but I suppose she's gone.

PERKINS. Yes—I sent her immediately.

RUTH. I only wanted my hat and coat—I'll fetch them myself.

(*She crosses quickly but stops at PERKINS.*)

I want to look at you, Perkins. (*She looks.*) If ever I appear to be unkind, I want you to believe that I'm not unkind to you, willingly, but because I'm forced to be. I wonder if you can understand what I mean?

PERKINS (*naïvely pretending to be puzzled*). What—do—you mean?

(*RUTH looks at her an instant then angrily takes her shoulders, shakes them viciously and flings her off.*)

RUTH. Don't you know my brother is in love with you?

PERKINS (*pretending to be astonished at the revelation*). He's—told—you?

RUTH. No—but you have.

(PERKINS bites her lip in chagrin.)

Come now—you *did* know it? (*Pause.*) You—*did*—know it.

PERKINS (*in a weak little fooling voice*). Yes!

RUTH. And—you—love—him?

(*Screwing up her features into the most absurd little pout, and marching her fingers along the edge of the table.*
PERKINS remains silent.)

RUTH. A-u-g-h! (*Furious.*) How do these outrageous things happen! (*She flops into chair left of centre table.*)

PERKINS (*mincingly*). I dunno! D'you?

RUTH. I haven't the faintest notion—unless it be that the world is such a topsy-turvy place that everybody misunderstands and miscalculates everybody else. I'm misunderstood.

PERKINS. By whom?

RUTH. Everybody thinks I'm a hard austere foxy female. I've caused the impression because I try to be sane where most women are clearly insane.

PERKINS. And being sane you don't want your brother to fall in love with *me*. Is that it?

RUTH. I certainly do not.

PERKINS. Why not?

RUTH. Because you are *not* worth the sacrifice of a huge fortune.

PERKINS (*countering*). You think he *ought* to marry Mrs. Calthorpe.

RUTH (*emphatically*). He *must* marry Mrs. Calthorpe. If my brother married you, his absurd sacrifice would so puff up his vanity that for six months he'd love you to distraction, but at the first tiff, he'd wonder whether you were quite worth what you cost him. (*Furious.*) The *second* time he wouldn't wonder.

PERKINS (*checking her merriment*). Whereas any

number of tiffs with Mrs. Calthorpe he could afford to ignore.

RUTH. Exactly. (*Jumps to her feet, restless.*)

PERKINS (*looking artlessly at RUTH*). So there's nothing very much in love after all!

RUTH. Love is a component part—it's the back axle of the matrimonial car. But that car must have tyres to run on, seats to sit in, a steering wheel and a gear box. And the gear box is more important than the back axle.

PERKINS. Then you're going to ask me not to be *his* back axle.

RUTH. Oh no, I'm not. I'm going to do my level best to prevent it. (*Viciously, and pointedly, in her face.*) But I shan't succeed.

PERKINS. Why not?

RUTH. Because a clever, fascinating, unscrupulous little wretch is going to defy me. But I warn you—my brother's a dreamer, and if he had wealth—which he'll never get as a rancher—he might dream something big enough to advance humanity. Let him marry you and you'll wreck him and yourself. I—warn—you, Perkins.

PERKINS. Aha! You warn me, do you! You think wealth is everything. I think it's nothing, and I know more about back axles than you do. (*Hotly.*)⁴ You're wrong, Ruth Wimbush. Love plus wealth can create miracles. Love alone can aspire to them and sometimes reach them, but wealth alone brings disillusionment—*always*. I've tried it, and I'm not anxious to give it a second chance.

RUTH. And you're not willing to give *any* chance to my brother.

PERKINS (*gloriously naïve and cryptic again*). I wonder.

RUTH (*angered*). Oh! stop your fascinating little tricks with me. Are—you—*willing* to give him a chance. Can't you see that in love like in everything else there must be some equality of sacrifice. What you're doing isn't fair.

PERKINS. Still I'm wondering.

RUTH. Come now—a bargain. I'll guarantee you a hundred thousand dollars if you'll help me marry my fool brother to your fool mistress.

PERKINS (*fooling deliciously*). That's a temptation, isn't it? What is it in real money?

RUTH (*expressively*). Twenty thousand pounds.

PERKINS (*a long whistle*). Ph—ew!

RUTH. You see—if you marry him you marry a pauper—don't forget that, and the loss of that money will haunt you, whereas if he marries your mistress—

PERKINS (*cutting in*). We *all* get fortunes.

RUTH. Of course we do.

PERKINS. What—a—splendid—idea. An—an—and it's a bit risky marrying a dreamer, isn't it?

RUTH. An appalling risk.

PERKINS. You never know where you are—he may break out at any moment.

RUTH. Even into poetry—Fergus does. He writes lots.

PERKINS (*horror-struck*). Poetry!

RUTH. Wanders into the woods, lies down beside a wild flower and does eighteen verses right off. It's awful.

PERKINS. The poetry is?

RUTH (*intense*). O—h! my dear, awful isn't the word for that. He comes home and *reads* it.

PERKINS (*horror-struck*). Reads the poetry! Then that decides it.

RUTH (*enraptured*). A—h! (*Enfolding her fervently*.) I knew you were a stunning little wretch and no fool the moment I saw you. (*Bustling across*.) We'll arrange our little manœuvre when I get back. I'm going up to the coastguard station, my sister is there with Mr. Gilmour. If I should miss her send her back to me, will you. (*They have reached the door*.) You see you were not quite so indifferent to a little ready money as you thought you were. (*Laughs*.)

PERKINS (*laughing back*). No! I say, you didn't try to bite me that time, did you?

RUTH (*rapturously*). Not on your life.

(*Laughing, she goes away, and PERKINS stands until her own laughter exhausts itself, then she begins to sing in sheer joy, flings herself into chair at writing table, covers her eyes with her hands and melts from song to laughter again as ADA and ROBERT appear at casement and stand watching her in surprise. Presently she discovers them and jumps up abashed.*)

PERKINS. Miss Ruth has gone to the coastguard station—she particularly wants you to go back to her.

ADA. Then I can't.

PERKINS. I promised her you should, Miss Ada. You must.

ADA (*petulantly*). I won't.

PERKINS. You—really—must. It's most important
(ADA looks appealingly at ROBERT.)

ROBERT (*with a smile*). I guess you've—got to.

(ADA, *wriggling her shoulders in childish disgust, turns slowly up. At the casement she turns a sorrowful little face to ROBERT who darts after her, but with a laugh she runs away. He returns eagerly to PERKINS, who has crept across to fireplace, peering reflectively into it.*)

ROBERT (*eagerly down and over her shoulder*). Lil—what d'you think of her? I never saw such a bewitching girl in all my life.

PERKINS (*abstractedly*). You haven't breathed a word to any one have you, about me?

ROBERT. Not a word.

PERKINS (*agitated*). Ruth intends motoring over to Little Titten in the morning, and calling on—Mrs. Calthorpe.

ROBERT (*alarmed*). The devil!

PERKINS (*naïvely*). She's just sent a wire—and actually gave it to me to take to the telegraph office.

(ROBERT *immensely tickled.*)

Oh, don't grin like a Cheshire cat.

ROBERT (*sobering himself*). What are you going to do now?

PERKINS (*at sea*). I hardly know. (*Wanders slowly doorwards and back.*) What was it you said about Ada, old chap? I didn't catch it.

ROBERT. I only asked you what you thought of her.

PERKINS (*turning him round and looking at him*). Ttsch! Ttsch! Ttsch! Have you got it—like the rest of us?

ROBERT. Got what!

(*PERKINS naïvely taps her heart spot.*)

ROBERT (*frantic—clutching her elbows*). Lil—she's wonderful, there isn't another like her this side of heaven.

(*She laughingly releases herself and stands laughing at him.*)

PERKINS. It's almost as contagious as the measles. (*Then she pretends to be very grave.*) Bobby, you think love is the only thing that matters, don't you?

ROBERT (*boyishly*). It's the only thing that is mattering just now.

PERKINS (*close up*). You're wrong. Love is only a comparative part—I mean component part. (*An absurd little pout.*) D'you know what a component part is?

ROBERT. I think so.

PERKINS (*with the most comical naïveté*). It's a back axle; and there are other things in life besides back axles, my son. Hoods and screens, and Jacks—as well as Jills—(*chuckling*)—that's one on the wicket—(*naïvely serious again*)—er—er—brakes!—and—er—those funny little things under the bonnet which you tickle when she won't start. (*She's thinking and he thinks.*)

ROBERT (*inspired*). I know—chins!

PERKINS. Not Ada's bonnet, you fool—the bonnet of a car.

ROBERT (*getting it*). O—h! You mean the carburettor.

PERKINS. Yes! the carburettor, and—and—er—
(*She gives it up with a laugh. She frantically clasps her hands and beams exultantly seawards.*) Oh! Great Lord, what a beautiful world you've given us fools to

live in. (*To door, peeping back.*) Don't go away, old man, in case I want you.

ROBERT. Rumbo!

PERKINS (*from the door, melting to foolery again*). And don't forget the carburettor.

(*Exit PERKINS. ROBERT flings himself into armchair.*)

(*FERGUS comes cautiously to casement and peeps nervously in.*)

FERGUS (*almost a whisper*). Is Ruth anywhere about?

ROBERT. She's gone up to the coastguard station

FERGUS (*relieved*). Thank God. (*Comes in.*)

ROBERT (*enjoying it*). What's up with you? Still worried?

FERGUS. I *am* worried. And *she's* worried, in fact—she's never really happy unless she's worrying about somebody. (*Pause.*) She says you're madly in love with Ada and Ada with you. Is it true?

ROBERT (*startled, nervously*). Well, half of it's true—and—and—I hope the other half will be.

FERGUS (*sticking out his hand and getting hold of ROBERT's*). I wish you luck.

ROBERT (*amazed, jumping up*). Fergie!

FERGUS. Now, don't say another word about it.

ROBERT. But this means you're not displeased, old chap.

FERGUS. Oh no, it doesn't. I'm up to my neck in the same sort of thing myself, and under the circumstances, I can't very well tell you what I think of you, can I? But you've only known my sister four days. I *have* known my little woman a week.

(*ROBERT tickled.*)

ROBERT (*with rare guile*). Who is she?

FERGUS. A—h! (*A chuckle.*) I'd give you a thousand chances and you'd never guess.

(*ROBERT is blank—FERGUS takes him by the arm and looking cautiously round whispers it.*)

It's—it's Perkins!

ROBERT (*pretence of astoundment*). Perkins!

FERGUS. Ssch! Ssch! Ssch!

ROBERT (*in a ghastly whisper*). Perkins?

FERGUS. There we are. You're the first person who has any idea of it and you're disgusted. 'Pears to me you damn Britishers——

ROBERT. Who says I'm disgusted. I hold that a man may marry whom he pleases so long as he doesn't choose a wrong 'un. (*Cryptically.*) Knowing what I know of Perkins you'll be an infernally lucky chap if you get her.

FERGUS (*fervently*). That's exactly my notion. And Ruth has wired Mrs. Calthorpe that she's motoring over to Little Titten in the morning with me. *With—me!* (*And he taps his chest.*) And although I've sworn on the graves of my forefathers that I won't go, you can bet every hair in your head I shall, if I don't slip out in the night and get clear. And if Ruth and Mrs. Calthorpe meet—good-bye Polly Perkins.

ROBERT. Then what do you propose to do?

FERGUS (*buttonholing him, very devilish*). I propose to propose at once—*now!*

ROBERT (*chuckling behind FERGUS' back, then pretending to be very dubious*). Well, of course, you know your own business best, but it's a bit risky, old man.

FERGUS (*bewildered*). Risky!

ROBERT. You're so previous. Women are funny devils. You can't drive 'em. Besides she's not making much out of it—is she?

FERGUS (*fogged*). Not much out of it? What class of man do your parlourmaids marry as a rule?

ROBERT. Well, the day you marry anybody but Mrs. Calthorpe you practically cut yourself off with a shilling.

FERGUS. There's the ten thousand of course—but—oh, Lord, I've promised that to the girls.

ROBERT. Then it's *less* than a shilling.

FERGUS. But I'm not a pauper, sonny. I've got the finest ranch on the Benson Range——

ROBERT (*supercilious*). Ranch!

FERGUS. —and the second best homestead in Ontario.

ROBERT. Why a high-bred English parlourmaid wouldn't look at a ranch. (*Incredulous.*) And do you see enough in Perkins to fling away eight hundred thousand pounds. (*In the highest register.*) Four—millions—of—dollars—without a—without a pang?

FERGUS (*heroically*). I do.

ROBERT. Pshew! You know you're not human—you're angelic.

FERGUS (*intensely*). Have you by any chance noticed her hands and teeth and hair?

ROBERT. I have.

FERGUS. Can you imagine what she'll look like—properly dressed?

ROBERT. I can.

FERGUS. Have you heard her talk—I mean without restraint?

ROBERT (*a significant sigh*). Both with and without.

FERGUS (*slap at him*). Then I don't want to hear another word. (*Swings away.*)

ROBERT (*largely*). Very well, old chap,—it's your beanfeast. (*He gets near door, chuckling in a half whisper.*) D'you want me to send her in?

FERGUS (*aflame*). A—h! and could you—could you conveniently walk up and down outside and keep the coast clear for—for half an hour?

ROBERT (*scared*). You're not going to take half an hour over it, surely?

FERGUS (*irritably*). You're wasting time! You're wasting time!

ROBERT (*smiling, and taking out his silver cigarette case*). I say! I'll send her in to find my cigarette case. Savvy?

(FERGUS *highly delighted answers with a joyous chuckle and ROBERT puts his cigarette case on the table.*)

(*Contemplating the case.*) Clever!

(*Exit ROBERT.*)

(FERGUS *shows nervousness. Poses himself facing glass and rehearsing in pantomime the actions of a servant*

lover, the advance, the fervour, the pressure of the hands upon the heart, the appeal, and so on. Then he picks up an illustrated paper, and reposes in armchair. Looks about, notices cigarette case, jumps up and covers it with his hat.)

FERGUS (*beaming at the dodge*). Now that is clever.

(*Returns to chair, holds up the paper and waits.*)

(PERKINS enters craftily and shows that she is up to the game. Fixes her gaze on table. Can't see the case. Slyly lifts off hat and puts it back again, then begins a search for the case, all round the room, fruitlessly. Comes to fire and jumps on bench to search the mantelpiece, lifting down the pewter pots to look inside. Turns and pretends she sees FERGUS for the first time, jumping down with a little scream of surprise.)

FERGUS (*jumping up, nervously*). Oh—it's—you!

PERKINS. You gave me quite a fright.

FERGUS. Aha!

PERKINS (*taking the lead*). What a lovely sunset—look, Mr. Wimbush.

(*She strolls to casement, he follows at her side in step and beaming upon her.*)

FERGUS (*enraptured at the scene*). It is fine, isn't it? I—I think those deep gold patches melting into the pale green are so beautiful.

PERKINS (*in ecstasy*). Yes—so soothing.

FERGUS (*intense*). You like beautiful scenery, Polly?

PERKINS. Beautiful scenery is like beautiful poetry. Mr. Wimbush. It softens and ennobles the human heart.

VOICE (*off—a stentorian and giggling warning*). La-da-i-da!

(ROBERT marches slowly across window.)

FERGUS (*leaning towards her impassioned and sotto voce*). It's only Bobby—outside—keeping guard. You were right. I love beautiful things—I can't help it—that's why I—I—I love——

PERKINS (*cutting him short*). I've missed that photograph that used to be here, on the mantelpiece, Mr. Wimbush.

FERGUS. Mrs. Calthorpe! I—I burnt it.

PERKINS. You burnt it!

FERGUS (*coming down to her nervously*). It—it annoyed me, I—I wanted to get it out of my mind. (*Closer.*) It didn't soften and ennoble any human heart, I assure you. I've got some photographs here that will—— Sit down—you can see them better.

(*She drops into armchair with her eyes fixed wonderingly on his. Then she slowly looks at some unmounted photographs which he gives her.*)

PERKINS. What—a—beautiful—place!

FERGUS (*bending over*). I'm so glad you like it. It's a homestead on Benson's Flats near the Great Lakes. It's mine.

PERKINS. Yours!

FERGUS. That's one of my herds of cattle—and my country stretches as far as you can see, right away to the maples on the top of the ridge there.

PERKINS (*enraptured*). Lovely!

FERGUS (*bending and peering intensely into her eyes*). It is—lovely—but—very—very—lonely—for a lone man, Polly.

PERKINS. Lonely! With all those cows, Mr. Wimbush.

FERGUS. Well, the cows don't talk—at least my cows don't. And those cows happen to be steers and heifers and calves and things.

PERKINS. Oh, I see—that makes a difference, doesn't it?

FERGUS. But *you* wouldn't like to be on a ranch in Canada——

(*She looks up.*)

Bobby tells me no self-respecting English parlourmaid would look at a ranch sideways.

PERKINS. Master Bob said that, did he? I can't

conceive anything more glorious. (*Hands photographs back again.*)

FERGUS. You can't. You're right. There isn't anything more glorious. We hunt and work, and fish and shoot, and in the winter there's miles of skating. D'you skate?

PERKINS. I love it—but, of course, there's not much chance for skating over here for a parlourmaid.

FERGUS (*intensely. Almost clutching her hand*). Chance is everything, isn't it?

PERKINS (*cleverly*). Y-e-s! (*Rising.*) But, Mr. Bob sent me to find his cigarette case. I wonder where it is.

FERGUS (*earnestly*). Polly—I want to say something to you—something important. (*Nervously.*) It—is lovely out there—in Canada.

PERKINS. I dare say. (*A little nervously too.*) I suppose neighbours are not very plentiful?

FERGUS. Not very, but then you're not pestered with undesirable ones as you are here. And yet we're only twenty-eight miles from a railway depôt.

PERKINS (*smiling gloriously*). O—h! Just a pleasant little walk. What do you do—what do you do for newspapers?

FERGUS. We get them about once in two weeks, when anybody happens to come along.

PERKINS. I see! Perhaps you're a bit wobbly in the commissariat department as well!

FERGUS (*with fervour*). No, oh, no! We lay in a stock of groceries twice a year.

(*PERKINS gasps with delicious naïveté.*)

Of course there's no difficulty about meat or poultry or eggs. (*As a merry surprise.*) And we've got electric light.

PERKINS. Wonderful! (*Pause.*) I suppose the postman calls occasionally, does he?

FERGUS. No. We fetch mail from railhead whenever we feel inclined.

PERKINS (*her bubbling eyes very nearly give her away*).

And—what—d'you—do—when you've got the hump?

FERGUS (*bravely*). You never get the hump.

PERKINS. Don't you. (*She has the greatest difficulty to keep a sober face.*) And what other attractions have you?

FERGUS (*has spotted her touches of irony and now counters by magnified earnestness*). The attractions of a real and glorious life that every man and woman was intended by God to live. (*His intensity has its effect, all her foolery goes, and looking straight down the room she listens as he pours his words into her ear.*) When you're tired you sleep, and there's no sleep under heaven like ours. You eat because your body craves for food, not because the clock chimes or the bell rings or the band plays—you sing because you have to sing, you laugh—because you *must* laugh or die—and—you—love—because the stars are so low down they *make* you love. (*She darts her eyes proudly upon him.*) That's the picture. Life! Every hour of the day or night. Rich, real, glorious life. What d'you say to it?

PERKINS. It's—past—belief! It's past belief, that any sober man or woman can go on living through these insanities of ours when you can get your newspapers only once in two weeks, your letters only when you want them, your groceries twice a year, and be only twenty-eight miles from the nearest railway depôt. (*He doesn't see the glorious smile lurking round the alleys of her mouth.*)

FERGUS (*frantic with suppressed joy*). Then you'll come!—you'll marry me, Polly, and return—as my wife?

PERKINS (*her eyes opening wide*). Your—wife! Is—that—what you want?

(PERKINS *turns nervously.*)

Oh, Mr. Wimbush, I'd—I'd no idea—you wanted—that.

FERGUS. Of course I want it. That's what I'm stopping on here for. I want *you*.

PERKINS. But—but what about Mrs. Calthorpe?

FERGUS (*maddened*). Damn Mrs. Calthorpe.

(Stuffing her fingers in her ears she gives a little shriek of mock horror.)

(Again.) Damn Mrs. Calthorpe.

PERKINS. Yes—but you've got to marry her first even if you damn her afterwards.

FERGUS. Never! I've done with Mrs. Calthorpe. I've done with that cursed will, and the only gratitude I bear my uncle is for the mighty chance of meeting you. Nothing else matters to me. If you'll come back to Benson's Flats, you'll make me the happiest man from Montreal to Vancouver and I'll make you the happiest woman on earth. You're worth a thousand millions, and I just want you, Polly.

PERKINS *(glorified, shaking her pretty head, touched by his infinite love)*. N—o! It's impossible. I've sworn you shall never marry Polly Perkins and—you never shall.

(With a groan of anguish he sinks on chair left of c. table and drops his face to his hands.)

(Softly). Cheer up. Wait until you've met Leila Calthorpe, just wait—you've only got to tell her a fraction of what you've told me and she'll marry you. She will—I promise it, and she'll make your life far happier than Polly Perkins ever could.

(She waits, but he does not move.)

Heigho! Where—is that—cigarette case?

(He still does not move, craftily she lifts the hat and takes up the case.)

(Opens and reads inscription.) "From Leila to Bobby."
(Peeping slyly across at him.) She's all over the shop, isn't she? *(To door.)* Do what you will—you can't get away from Mrs. Calthorpe.

(She turns, and as she slowly disappears she throws him a bewitching little kiss from her finger tips, and the closing of the door hides her laughing eyes. ROBERT and the GIRLS are seen to pass the casement. Surreptitiously ROBERT comes closer and peeps through the glass.)

ROBERT (*pushing open the casement a few inches. Sotto voce*). All clear?

FERGUS (*darting up furious*). All clear! Come in, the whole lot of you. All is as clear as crystal.

(*The three come in rather terrified.*)

I've got something to say to you, something that'll please you mightily. You all know I'm in love with Perkins, don't you?

ADA (*amazed*). Perkins! (*She looks at the others for corroboration.*)

FERGUS. Yes, Perkins—I've proposed to her—asked her to marry me, and you all thought no doubt she'd jump at me, jump so mighty quick that I'd be bowled over by the rush. Aha! She's turned me down—as flat as a griddle cake. She says there's only one woman in the world for me and for Alberta, and her name isn't Perkins.

(*RUTH beams triumphantly.*)

And I've a mighty fine notion that she's been got at—by all of you, and by you—(*at his sister RUTH*)—most of all. (*Furious.*) You think you've beaten me. Aha! you wait. (*Roughly to door.*) Just—you—wait.

(*Exit FERGUS. All eyes on the exit.*)

ADA (*in a dream looking at RUTH. Incredible*). Perkins! is it true?

RUTH (*with great earnestness*). I've learned in eight days to have a high appreciation of English women. But Perkins has astonished me, she's a fine creature, and if it hadn't been for that insane will I'd have made her accept him.

(*Exit RUTH. For a moment ADA and ROBERT are baffled.*)

ADA (*to ROBERT*). Did you know he was in love with Perkins?

ROBERT (*completely mystified*). Yes—I—er—I—suspected it, but I can't make it out—what the dickens has she refused him for?

ADA (*starchily*). What—do—you—mean? We don't want him to marry Perkins.

ROBERT (*blank, then gathering her meaning*). No! Of course we don't. (*A guffaw.*) Not much.

ADA. Fancy all that money going to waifs and strays.

ROBERT. Yes, fancy. Four—million—dollars—why it does me good even to say it. (*A blank look. At ADA.*) You know your brother's an ass, but I know some one who's criminally insane. (*Another sigh.*) Four—million—dollars! And here am I with a capital of two pounds eight and a tourist's return half to London.

ADA (*concerned*). But, Bob dear—that's not all you've got.

ROBERT. Except a few debts.

ADA. And if Fergus and your cousin had made a match of it, he was going to give Ruth and me two hundred and fifty thousand dollars each. (*Naïvely*). That would have been enough to have started on, wouldn't it?

ROBERT. Besides what I could have earned.

ADA (*dolefully*). Could you earn much, Bobby?

ROBERT. About sevenpence an hour I think—as a timekeeper, or companion to an elderly gentleman, with the gout.

ADA. Oh, it's rotten luck. What's the good of being in love at all for.

ROBERT. No good—really, except to kill time.

ADA (*piqued*). D'you mean to say you'll never be in a position to marry?

ROBERT (*plump*). Never.

ADA. But I thought all English gentlemen who had been to Oxford or Cambridge had plenty of money.

ROBERT (*with a grim smile*). Well, not all. You see my mother had eleven of us and they're all doing fairly well except me, and by some extraordinary freak of fate I've got the artistic temperament of the entire family.

ADA. What's that?

ROBERT. What's what?

ADA. The—er—what you said.

ROBERT. Oh! Well, when anybody wants to put a new carpet in their spare bedroom, they invite me down for a week-end. On Sunday they commence to talk art, and by Monday morning they've sneaked all my colour sense at the cost of a couple of cheap dinners and a little weak tea.

ADA (*innocently*). And they don't *pay* you?

ROBERT (*uplifted*). *Pay!* What! A man with an artistic temperament? Oh, my dear! (*His hand to his head.*)

(*Enter RUTH smartly.*)

RUTH (*coming on, unnerved and agitated*). Fergus is packing up.

ADA (*tremulously*). What's going to happen now?

RUTH. Well, if he goes, we must go too. Anything is better than to remain here. It can't be to any of our interests to encourage a renewal of this ridiculous proposal to Perkins. (*To ROBERT.*) Can it?

ROBERT. Well—er—I'm rather in a delicate position.

RUTH. Indeed you are, Mr. Gilmour, and we recognize that.

ROBERT. You know I advise masterly inactivity. (*Cryptically.*) But if we were wise—*really* wise—we'd send for Perkins.

RUTH (*furious*). That annoys me, Mr. Gilmour. I have a very high opinion of Perkins, and I've already dealt with her, but she's getting on my nerves.

ROBERT (*quite unable to explain it*). Well, of course where ignorance is bliss it's folly to be wise. (*Striking an absurd dramatic attitude.*) Unfortunately my tongue is sealed.

(*Enter FERGUS in travelling overcoat and Homburg hat. He marches hurriedly across.*)

FERGUS (*masterfully*). Last train 7.39—can't catch it. (*To ROBERT.*) What's the first in the morning?

ROBERT. As a matter of fact, old man, it's the 5.22

They call it the poultry train—it's generally full of eggs clotted cream and ducks.

FERGUS. Ergh! Sounds as if it might be *my* train, doesn't it? (*To RUTH rudely.*) You're probably staying on?

RUTH. We shall certainly not leave without paying our personal compliments to Mrs. Calthorpe.

FERGUS. Bully! A very excellent notion.

(*He is actually going right out, but PERKINS enters with a telegram on tray and he retreats. She takes telegram to RUTH.*)

PERKINS. The boy is waiting.

(*RUTH tears open the envelope and glances quickly.*)

PERKINS (*speaking through door*). Take your scooter off the doorstep.

RUTH (*reading it out rather excitedly*). "Leaving immediately for home, arriving about half-past seven, Calthorpe."

(*FERGUS has irritably turned his back. RUTH takes the wire to him, ADA excitedly close up, ROBERT looks naively round at PERKINS as if to say "What's the meaning of this?" PERKINS reassures him with a pronounced wink and a finger on her lips. He doesn't know a bit what she's up to, but he groans knowingly.*)

RUTH (*as she presents the wire to FERGUS*). Would you like to see it?

FERGUS. I—should—not.

RUTH (*turning*). No answer, Perkins, thank you.

(*Exit PERKINS smartly.*)

ROBERT (*heroically*). Now what have you to say? The first things Leila does is to explain her absence and apologize.

FERGUS (*buttoning up his coat. Loftily*). You will make *my* apologies to Mrs. Calthorpe and say that I deeply regret I was unable to remain and receive her in person. (*Snarling it out.*) Giving a bit of her own back.

RUTH (*firmly*). We shall offer *no* apologies—if you dare to leave, and it's already gone half-past—we shall tell Mrs. Calthorpe the truth.

FERGUS. Well, that's more than she told us, anyway. (*Crossing.*) I'll send a fly for my bag, and stay the night at the station hotel. I wish you all a merry evening.

ADA (*darting to him and tearfully clutching his coat like a distracted child*). You shan't go, Fergus—you—shan't go. (*And she gets between him and the door. There is a mild little scuffle.*)

ROBERT (*bravely*). Look here, old man—you're not playing the game.

FERGUS (*giving him a mighty glare*). O—h!

ROBERT. This sort of thing may be all right in Alberta, but in this country we don't usually leave ladies in the lurch.

FERGUS (*freeing himself from ADA and facing ROBERT*). Don't you!

ROBERT. My Cousin Leila is probably less anxious to meet you than you are to meet her, but if you make a fool of yourself and clear out now, you'll never cease to regret it.

FERGUS (*really ruffled*). Hark at that now! I guess you're standing in with Ruth.

ROBERT (*warming up splendidly*). There's no harm in guessing what you like, but there's no need to be rude.

FERGUS. Rude, is it?

ROBERT (*putting it on in fine form*). You've been extremely rude. You've accepted the hospitality of my cousin, and during her absence you've been making love and proposing to one of her domestic servants. Now that may be very romantic and very Canadian, but it's also very *cheap*—and it's a damned insult to us. (*Remembers the ladies and turns greatly incensed at himself.*) I beg your pardon—I—beg—your pardon. (*Hides his flushing cheeks with his hands.*)

RUTH (*icily*). No need for pardon, Mr. Gilmour—we quite agree with you, and this is a new aspect of the matter altogether.

ADA (*clutching his arm tearfully*). Bobby!

ROBERT (*bluffing splendidly*). No, no, let's have this thing out.

(ROBERT is humbugging all through this scene and does it with superb gusto.)

(At FERGUS.) You're a mighty fine judge of women, Fergus, but your Uncle Ben could make rings round you.

FERGUS (*cynically enraged*). Aha! I like that immensely! Rings round me!

ROBERT. And I'm going to prove it.

FERGUS. Good! I'm just nervous for the proof.

ROBERT. I'm as poor as a rat, but when I'm twenty-five I come into a small invested fortune of five thousand—pounds. I'll bet you five thousand that you'll want to marry Mrs. Calthorpe when you see her, and not Polly Perkins.

FERGUS (*beside himself*). You'll—do—what?

ROBERT (*blandly to GIRLS*). I think my offer was perfectly clear?

RUTH (*with an air*). Quite clear.

ADA. —and simple.

FERGUS (*incredulous*). You'll bet me five thousand pounds that I shall want your cousin in preference to Miss Perkins.

ROBERT. Yes! and another five thousand—on the nod!—that you do marry her.

FERGUS. You're not well, Robert—you're trying to induce me to take advantage of your youthful innocence.

ROBERT. Don't you bother about my innocence. Is it a bet?

FERGUS (*gripping hands*). Most emphatically. An even ten thousand I marry your cousin.

ROBERT. No! Oh, no! Five thousand you want to marry her, and five thousand you do.

FERGUS. Well, that's what I said.

ROBERT. Oh no, you didn't, sonny. She may turn you down like Perkins did.

(Both GIRLS shriek with cynical laughter.)

FERGUS (*hipped*). Guess this thing has got you al' tickled. Very well—I wait and see the lady.

(*Enter MARTHA quite excitedly.*)

MARTHA. The Mistress has just arrived, Mr. Bob.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*off in hall, smothering her voice into an awful vulgar twang*). Ask the taxi man what his fare is, Martha, and give 'im a glass o' beer.

(*The three WIMBUSHES horrified at the voice exchange weird glances of dismay.*)

RUTH (*sotto voce*). Good gracious!

FERGUS. Aha! The voice is as musical as the face is sweet.

(*ROBERT—his back turned to them—as he faces the door waiting, grins largely and MRS. CALTHORPE enters, hatted, coated and heavily veiled.*)

ROBERT (*rising to the situation with gusto*). Leila!

MRS. CALTHORPE (*sotto voce*). Introduce me!

(*ROBERT turns with her as MARTHA goes out.*)

ROBERT (*taking MRS. CALTHORPE up a pace*). Miss Wimbush, Mrs. Calthorpe.

RUTH (*putting on a silly smile*). How do you do?
(*Hand shaken.*)

ROBERT. This is Ada—Ada, Leila.

ADA (*her hand out and not at all graciously*). How d'you do?

ROBERT. Fergus, m'hearty—the forbidden fruit.

(*He pushes MRS. CALTHORPE towards FERGUS. MRS. CALTHORPE with a weird little gurgle gives him both her hands, he shies, but takes them.*)

FERGUS (*with a look of amused disgust*). Delighted—we were beginning to think the pleasure would never come.

ROBERT. Rule Britannia! And now I think we'd better remove the camouflage.

(*With a swift fooling movement evidently prearranged,*

he sweeps off the heavy veil of MRS. CALTHORPE's hat, exposing the ubiquitous PERKINS. The three WIMBUSHES astounded and for a moment gaze dumbfounded.)

RUTH. Polly!

ADA. Perkins!

FERGUS (*sinking into armchair*). My God!

ROBERT (*with a huge chuckle*). Goddess, old man—goddess. (*Smacking him on the back.*) Won by a head. Ten thousand to me, I think.

ADA (*gathering her wits. In rapture*). Then it's all right. (*A shriek.*) Perkins—you darling.

(*She flies at her and flings her arms round her neck, until ROBERT draws her away out of the picture.*)

RUTH (*quite outwitted*). I—I hardly know what to say, except that I think, Mr. Gilmour, an explanation is necessary.

MRS. CALTHORPE (*sweetly*). So do I. Your Uncle Ben was a dear old fellow—but that will was not only vicious, it was vindictive. I had no chance to prepare for Mr. Wimbush as I ought to have had, and so I conceived the idea of being my own parlourmaid, and my own judge of character. (*To RUTH, her voice softening.*) I'd had one experience of a faulty back axle and I wasn't making any mistake with the next, not even for two million dollars from Uncle Ben. Of course (*with sweet naïveté, peeping at the passive FERGUS*) I've already refused Fergus. (*Sweetly to RUTH.*) I had to, hadn't I—and if he asks me again I shall put a condition on my acceptance, that the half of your uncle's estate which was bequeathed conditionally to me, must be divided unconditionally between you, (*giving RUTH an angelic look*) and your sister. We cannot encourage men, even when they're dead, to ignore their obligations.

ADA (*in the background*). Leila!

(ROBERT represses her.)

MRS. CALTHORPE. And I'm quite sure the other half is enough for any one residing—(*to FERGUS*) what did you say?—twenty-eight miles from the nearest railway depôt.

(*There is a pause. ADA comes close to MRS. CALTHORPE. Everybody expects FERGUS to have something to say, but he's immersed in a sickly grin.*)

RUTH (*sternly*). Fergus!

FERGUS (*rising wearily*). All very charming, and sentimental. But I haven't been fooled, have I! (*Bang at the whole crowd.*) My leg hasn't been pulled, has it?

(*Consternation of the whole company.*)

Uncle Ben and dear Cousin Leila don't score, do they? Ruth and Ada and Master Bobby don't get the pinch on me, I guess! Ergh! Well, I do just like a joke, and the joke *here* is, that I'm—not proposing—to marry—anybody. I'm through.

(*And picking up his hat with a merry chuckle which slowly broadens into a delicious smile he passes four white bewildered faces, to the door. Here he turns and laughs on.*)

(*As he opens the door.*) It—strikes—me—somebody hasn't won by a head—he's been caught on the post Aha! Aha-ha-ha! Aha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!

(*Exit FERGUS. Every eye focussed on him in amazement.*)

ROBERT (*scared out of his wits*). And, by Jupiter, he means it. (*Pause.*)

ADA (*half a step to the door—in a poor piping little squeal*). Fergus!

(RUTH *regaining her dignity marches to door and opens it imperiously.*)

RUTH. Fergus!

(*In the distance there is a weird little triumphant chuckle. RUTH goes out swiftly, followed by ADA.*)

ROBERT (*bang in poor MRS. CALTHORPE's face. Resentfully*). Overdone it.

(*Exit ROBERT.*)

(MRS. CALTHORPE *stands c. dumbly gazing at the open*

door. *There is running upstairs and downstairs and voices.*)

ADA (*off tearfully*). Fergus dear!

RUTH (*off terrified*). He's not upstairs.

ROBERT (*off agitated*). Did Mr. Wimbush go out at the front door, Martha?

MARTHA (*off emphatic*). I dunno where he's gorn—ain't I busy getting the dinner?

(Bustle and hurrying effect off.)

(Round the open casement peeps FERGUS. He strains his neck to catch a view of MRS. CALTHORPE. Beaming with roguish joy and triumph he steals in behind her, listening to the rumpus outside, then he taps her on the shoulder. She turns with a sweet little shriek of alarm.)

FERGUS (*fiendish*). That's frightened 'em and I guess you're looking a bit shivery, m'lady.

(Very sheepishly she fiddles with the buttons on his waistcoat. He takes her cheeks in his hands.)

Polly—oh, you little—Polly! *(They embrace rapturously.)*

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